

HARLEY QUINN

BY
STJEPAN
ŠEJIC

BOOK
ONE



BLACK
LABEL



hotComic.net



BOOK ONE

STJEPAN ŠEJIĆ
STORY AND ART

GABRIELA DOWNIE
LETTERS

STJEPAN ŠEJIĆ
COVER AND VARIANT COVER

HARLEY QUINN CREATED BY
PAUL DINI AND BRUCE TIMM

AT FIRST IT SEEMS LIKE ANOTHER NIGHTMARE.

IN THIS DREAM I WALK A LONG, WINDING ROAD THROUGH A WARPED VERSION OF GOTHAM.

I'VE DREAMT OF THIS ROAD BEFORE. I'VE SEEN THE TERRORS THAT AWAITS ME AT ITS END.

AND YET, EVERY TIME, I KEEP WALKING.

EVERY TIME I THINK, THIS TIME WILL BE DIFFERENT.

AND THIS TIME, I'M RIGHT.

ANY OTHER NIGHT, THE MIST WOULD RISE AND A GRINNING MONSTER WOULD ERUPT OUT OF IT TO DEVOUR ME.

THIS NIGHT, THERE IS NO SINISTER LAUGHTER. NO MOUTH WITH TOO MANY TEETH SMILING HUNGRILY AT ME.

NO, THIS TIME IT'S JUST THE BATS.

THEY LOOK LIKE BATS, BUT IN MY DREAMING MIND THEY'RE VULTURES.

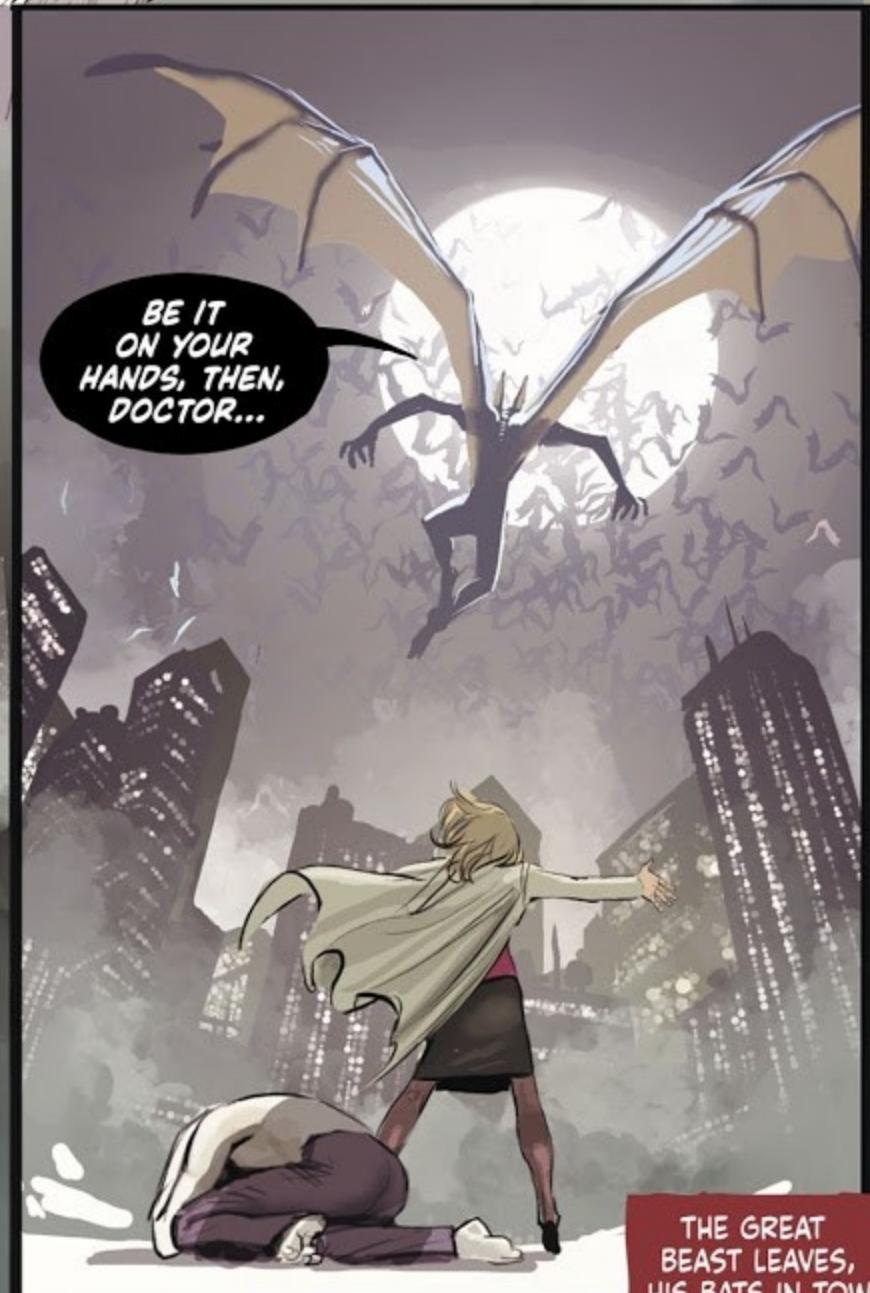
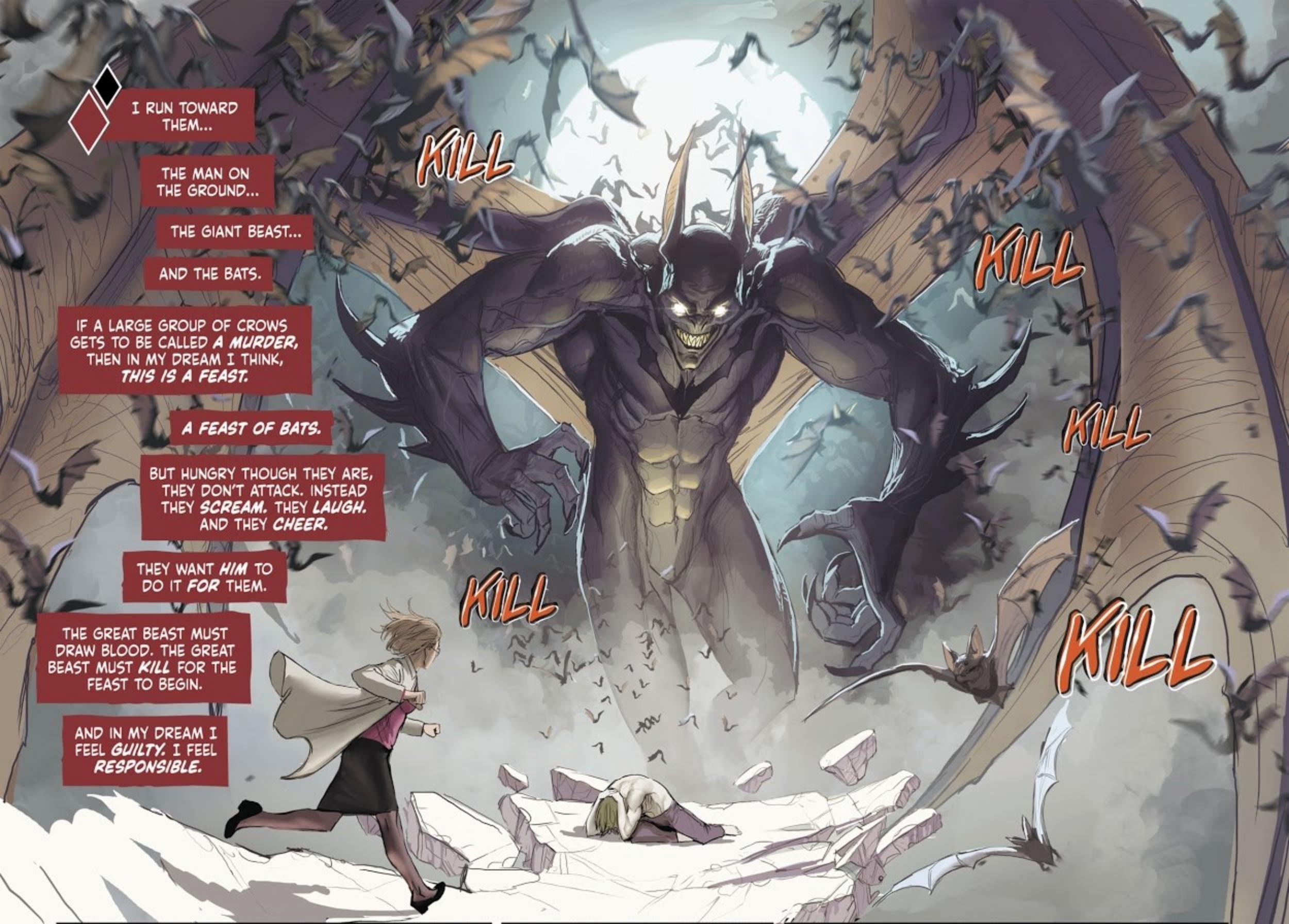
SUDDENLY I'M SURE OF ONE THING: SOMEONE IS ABOUT TO DIE!

THEY TAKE ME TO THE INEVITABLE PLACE...

... THE END OF THE ROAD WHERE SWIRLING MISTS RISE AND, LIKE EVERY OTHER TIME, HE IS THERE.

BUT THIS TIME IT'S DIFFERENT.

THIS TIME, THE MONSTER IS DIFFERENT...



THE AIR GROWS SILENT.

ARE YOU...

ARE YOU
OKAY?

YOU...
WHY DIDN'T
YOU RUN?
YOU WERE
SUPPOSED TO
RUN.

NOT
ANYMORE.
I AM YOUR
DOCTOR.
I'M HERE
TO HELP.

YES, THIS DREAM
IS DIFFERENT.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, HIS
FACE IS NOT MONSTROUS.

HE SMILES... AND I MAKE THE
WORST MISTAKE OF MY LIFE...

...I SMILE BACK.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I WOULD
THINK BACK ON THIS DREAM AND
FIGHT BACK A LAUGH.

THE WHOLE THING FELT LIKE ONE OF THOSE TRASHY
ROMANCE TALES WHERE A PLAIN, ORDINARY GIRL
MEETS MR. TALL, SEXY AND DANGEROUS. A BEAST
THAT SIMPLY NEEDS HER GENTLE TOUCH
AND A LITTLE BIT OF GUIDANCE.

IN THOSE STORIES, THE GIRL HELPS
THE BEAST REGAIN HIS HUMANITY...

IN THOSE STORIES, THE
BEAST LOVES THE GIRL...

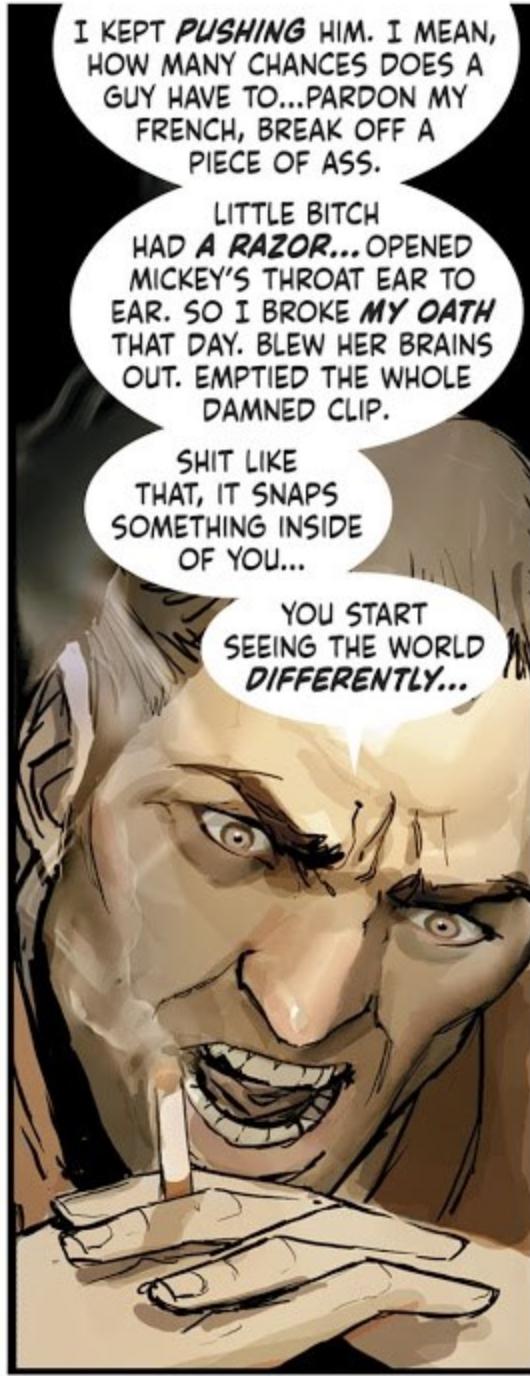
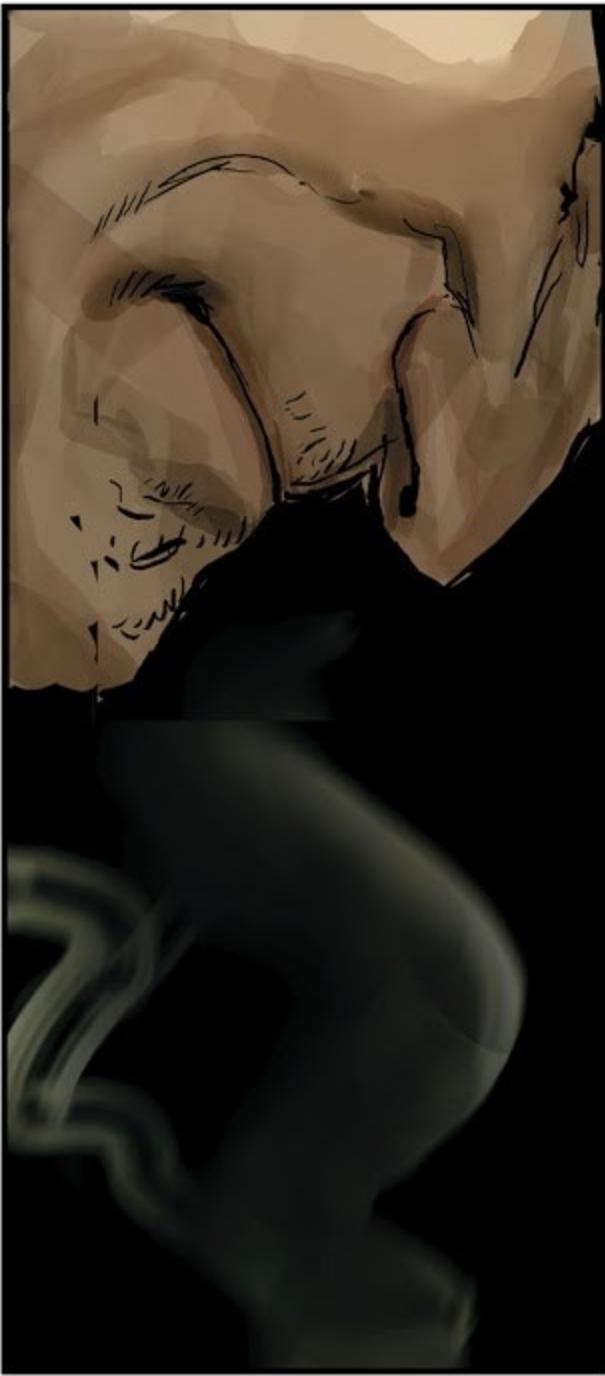
I ASSURE YOU, MINE IS
NOT ONE SUCH STORY.
NO, MY STORY ENDED UP BEING
SOMETHING COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT.



MY STORY'S THE ONE WHERE THE GIRL DANCES WITH THE DEVIL, AND HE TAKES HER WITH HIM ON A LONG ROAD TO HELL.

THAT ROAD STARTS, AS THEY OFTEN DO...

...WITH A **GOOD**
INTENTION.





TWO YEARS LATER.

MR. MORRIS FAILED
TO MENTION THAT THE HOSPITAL
HE OPENED FIRE ON ALSO HOUSED
24 INJURED CHILDREN.

THERE WERE NO
SURVIVORS.



EDUCATIONAL SYMPOSIUM:

Center for the Study
of Criminal Psychology,
Gotham City.

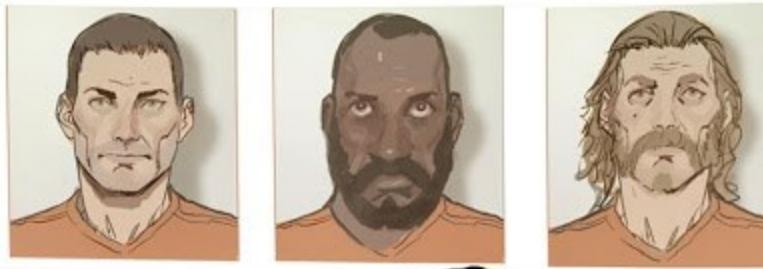
"IN A WAR ZONE,
EMPATHY IS A
LIABILITY."

"ACKNOWLEDGING THE HUMANITY
OF YOUR ENEMY WILL CAUSE
YOU TO HESITATE."

"IT IS A COURTESY YOUR
OPPONENT MAY NOT
GRANT YOU IN
RETURN."

THESE WERE
THE WORDS OF
MR. MORRIS'S SUPERIOR
OFFICER, WHO TO THIS
DAY DEFENDS HIS
SUBORDINATE'S
ACTIONS.

THESE
WORDS SPEAK TO
THE HEART OF THE
PROBLEM AND DEFINE
THE CORE OF MY
HYPOTHESIS.



IT IS AN INSTINCTIVE **REACTION**
THAT **OVERRIDES** REGULAR BRAIN
CHEMISTRY WHILE DAMPENING
ONE'S ABILITY TO PROCESS
EMPATHY.

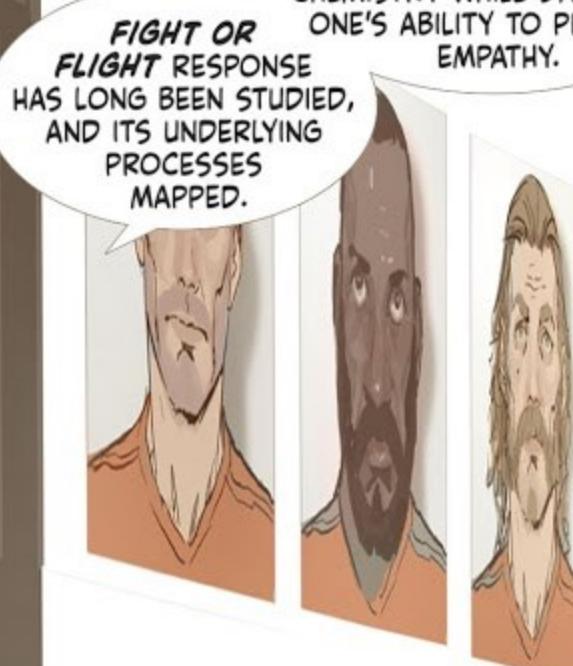
IN A WAR ZONE, THIS STATE
OF HYPERAROUSAL CAN
SAVE LIVES.

THIS
INSTINCT IS A PART
OF A **GREATER**
MECHANISM.

A KIND
OF A **MENTAL IMMUNE
SYSTEM** DESIGNED TO
PROTECT US FROM IMMINENT
THREAT BY MANAGING BODY
CHEMISTRY IN A WAY THAT
MAXIMIZES OUR CHANCES
OF SURVIVAL.

BUT WHAT
IF THIS MECHANISM
IS OVERUSED?

AND FOR
EXTENDED PERIODS
OF TIME?

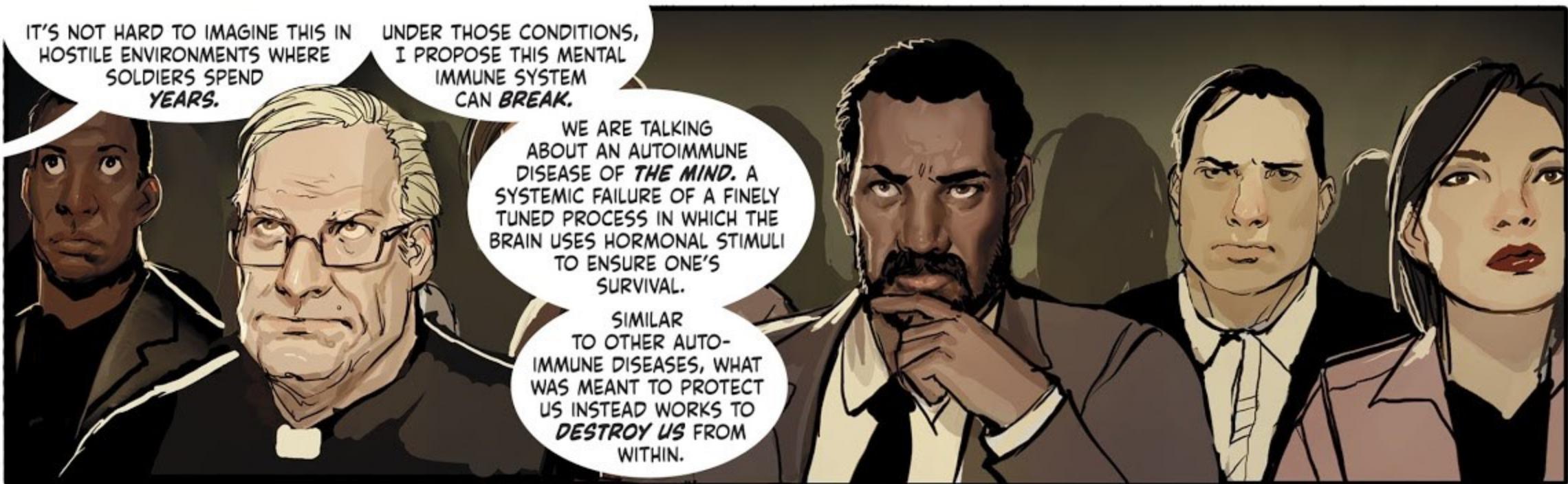


IT'S NOT HARD TO IMAGINE THIS IN
HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE
SOLDIERS SPEND
YEARS.

UNDER THOSE CONDITIONS,
I PROPOSE THIS MENTAL
IMMUNE SYSTEM
CAN **BREAK**.

WE ARE TALKING
ABOUT AN AUTOIMMUNE
DISEASE OF THE MIND. A
SYSTEMIC FAILURE OF A FINELY
TUNED PROCESS IN WHICH THE
BRAIN USES HORMONAL STIMULI
TO ENSURE ONE'S
SURVIVAL.

SIMILAR
TO OTHER AUTO-
IMMUNE DISEASES, WHAT
WAS MEANT TO PROTECT
US INSTEAD WORKS TO
DESTROY US FROM
WITHIN.



TO PUT IT BLUNTLY, THIS MAY RESULT IN **PERMANENT DETERIORATION** OF EMPATHY WHICH, UH...

...WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO DEVELOPING **ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS**...

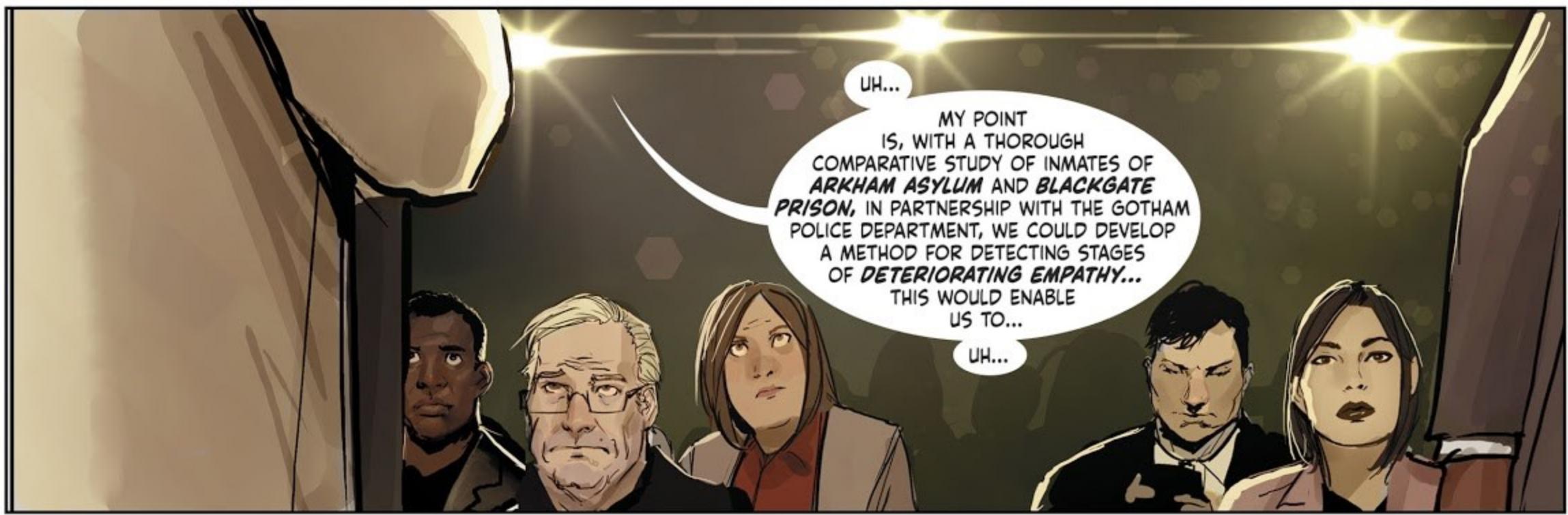
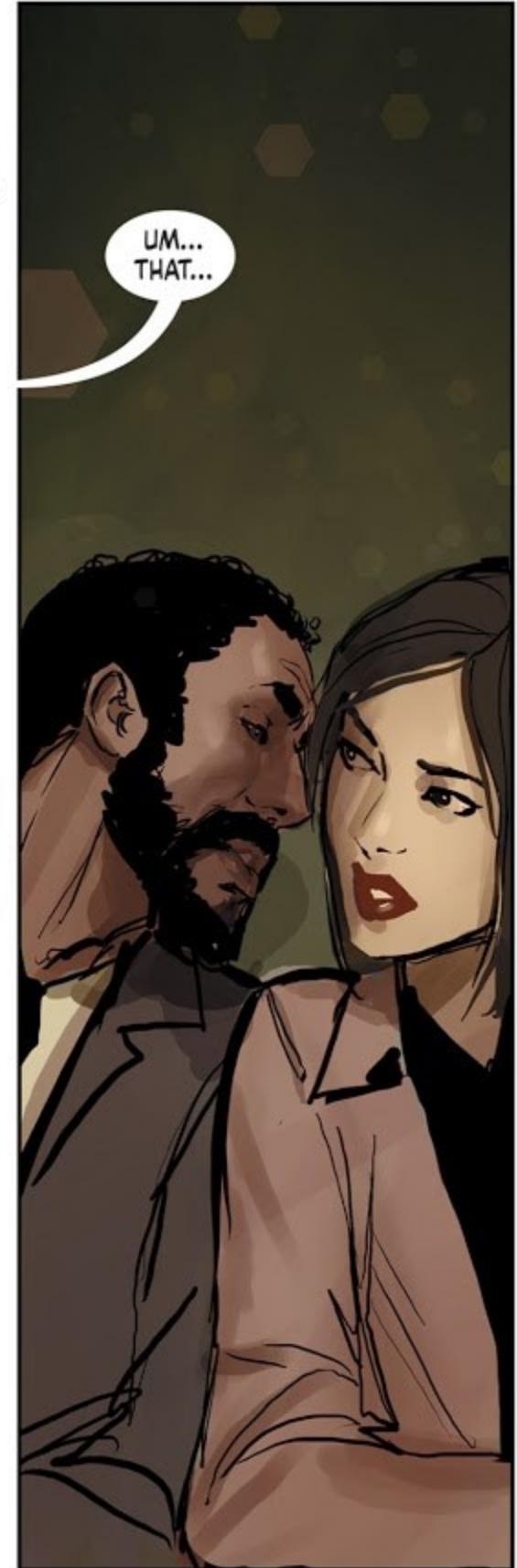
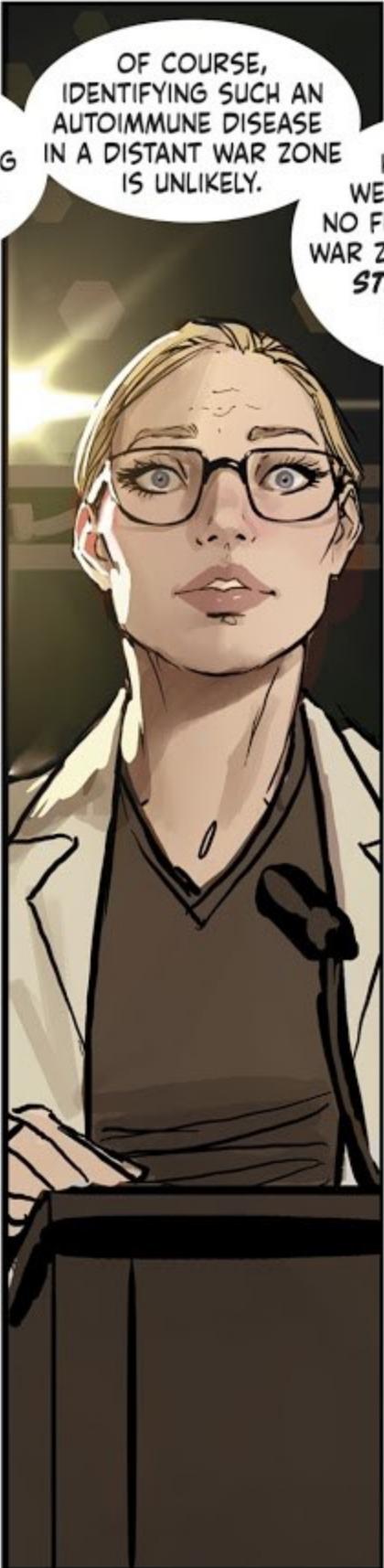
OF COURSE, IDENTIFYING SUCH AN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE IN A DISTANT WAR ZONE IS UNLIKELY.

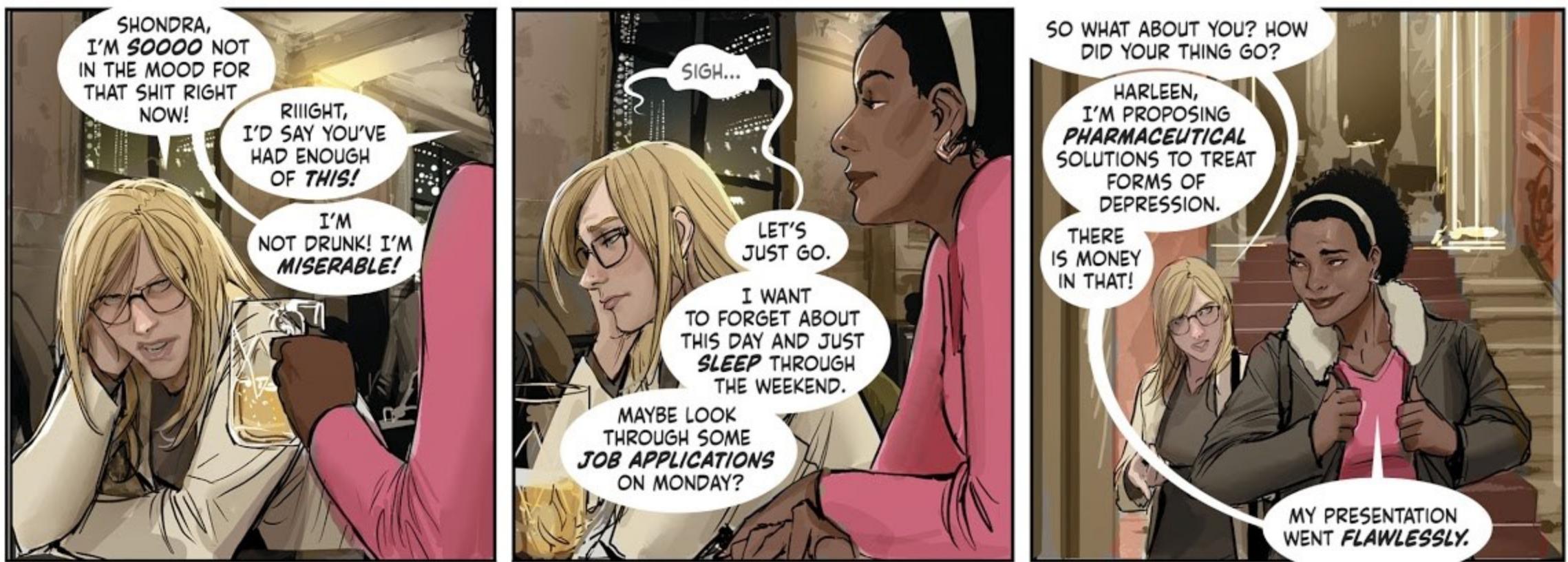
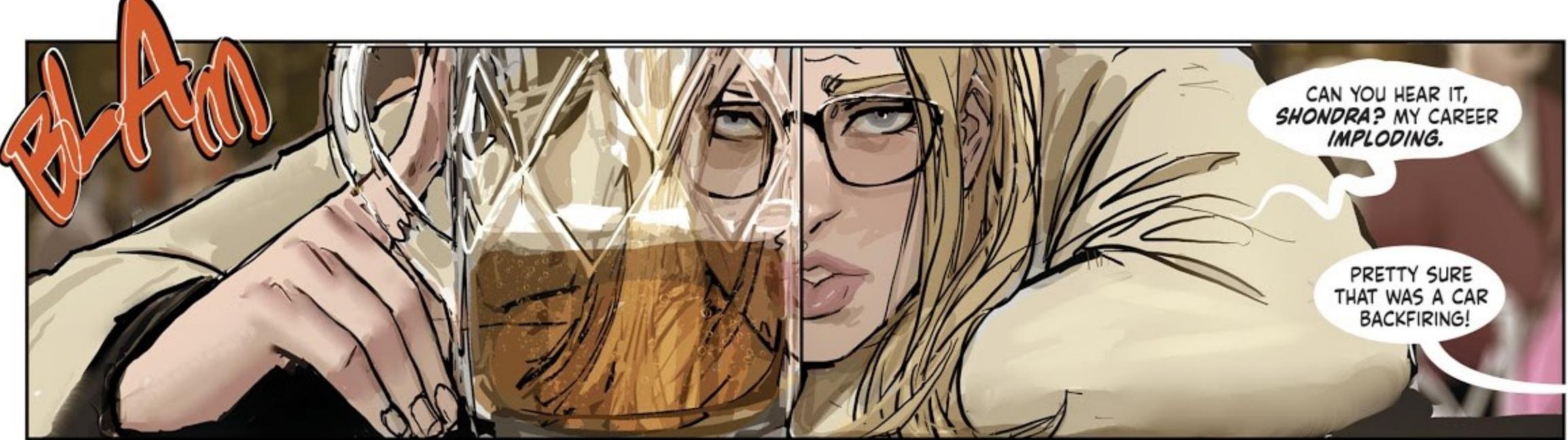
HOWEVER, WE NEED LOOK NO FURTHER FOR A WAR ZONE THAN THE **STREETS OF GOTHAM** ITSELF...

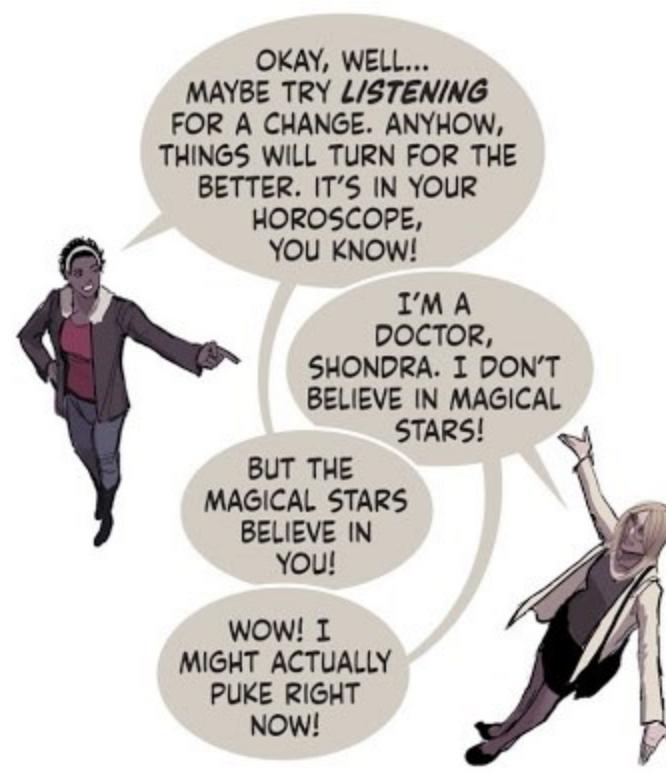
UH...

STATISTICS OF RECIDIVISM **STRONGLY INDICATE** THAT THERE IS A LARGE ISSUE NOT ONLY WITH PETTY CRIMINALS RELAPSING INTO THE LIFE OF CRIME, BUT ALSO WITH THE **INCREASING SEVERITY** OF THOSE CRIMES...

UM... THAT...











NOT EVEN WHEN
THE DEVIL HIMSELF
COMES TO GREET YOU.

NOW WHAT
DID I TELL YOU, BOYS?
WHEN BUYING WEAPONS,
THERE'S JUST NO BEATING
**PERSONAL QUALITY
CONTROL!**

WRAP
IT ALL UP
TO GO!



THINKING BACK ON IT ALL, I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER...IF I HAD READ THAT HOROSCOPE, WHAT WOULD IT HAVE SAID FOR THAT DAY?

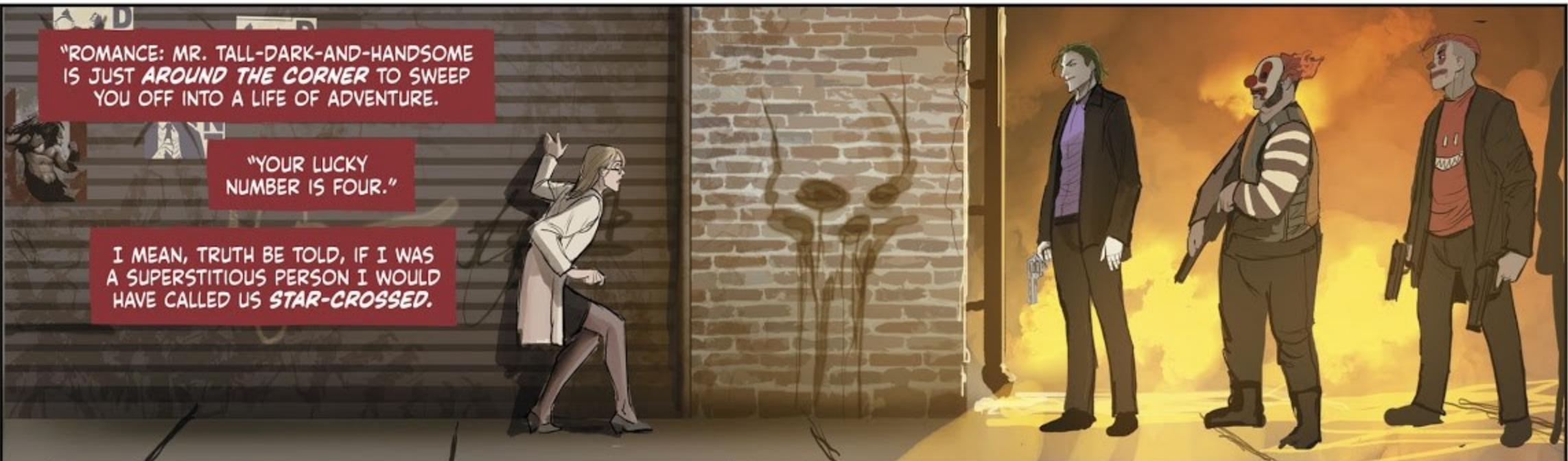
"THE STARS MAY BE LOOKING AT YOU, BUT THEY ARE UP TO **NO GOOD**, SO MIND YOUR STEP."

"HEALTH: POSSIBILITY OF NOISE-INDUCED MIGRAINE. AVOID **STRESSFUL** SITUATIONS."

"ROMANCE: MR. TALL-DARK-AND-HANDSOME IS JUST **AROUND THE CORNER** TO SWEEP YOU OFF INTO A LIFE OF ADVENTURE."

"YOUR LUCKY NUMBER IS **FOUR**."

I MEAN, TRUTH BE TOLD, IF I WAS A SUPERSTITIOUS PERSON I WOULD HAVE CALLED US **STAR-CROSSED**.



IN FACT, LOVE NEVER EVEN CROSSED MY MIND.

WHAT DID CROSS MY MIND, HOWEVER, WAS A WHOLE LIFETIME OF DECISIONS.



BECAUSE LET'S BE HONEST:
THEN AND THERE, IT WAS
VERY LIKELY THE LAST THING
TO EVER CROSS MY MIND
WOULD BE A BULLET.





BOB, YOU'RE MY NUMBER ONE GUY NOW!

UH...OKAY, BOSS!

ANYWAYS, MY APOLOGIES, BATS! I HAD SOME COMPANY RESTRUCTURING TO DO, BUT NOW YOU HAVE MY FULL ATTENTION! HOW MAY I ASSIST YOU?

DROP THE WEAPONS!

JUST LIKE THAT, HUH? SERIOUSLY? WHEN HAS THAT EVER WORKED FOR YOU?

I MEAN, YOU GOT YOUR MEAN BAT-PLANE THING...WHAT'S IT GONNA BE? YOU GONNA OPEN FIRE ON US? GONNA START KILLIN'?

POINT I'M MAKING IS...WE GOT OUR CARROT, SO WHERE'S THE STICK?

IT'S MORE OF A BAT, REALLY.

HA! AND THEY SAY YOU DON'T HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR!

I REMEMBER
ONE THOUGHT RUNNING
THROUGH MY DAZED MIND.

I'M TRAPPED...

I'M TRAPPED BETWEEN
SMOKE AND FIRE.



AND I AM
TERRIFIED.

WAH!



WOA,
LADY! CALM
DOWN!
GOOD
GUYS HERE!
OH THANK
GOD!



CAN
YOU WALK ALL
RIGHT?
Y-YEAH?
GOOD. I'LL
NEED YOU TO KEEP
YOUR HEAD DOWN AND
FOLLOW US! CAN YOU
DO THAT?
FOLLOW
YOU WHERE?
THE
FUCK OUTTA
HERE.
WE'RE
GOING FOR THE
SUBWAY ENTRANCE
AROUND THE
CORNER.
THAT'S...
THAT'S ACROSS
THE ROAD?



SHIT!

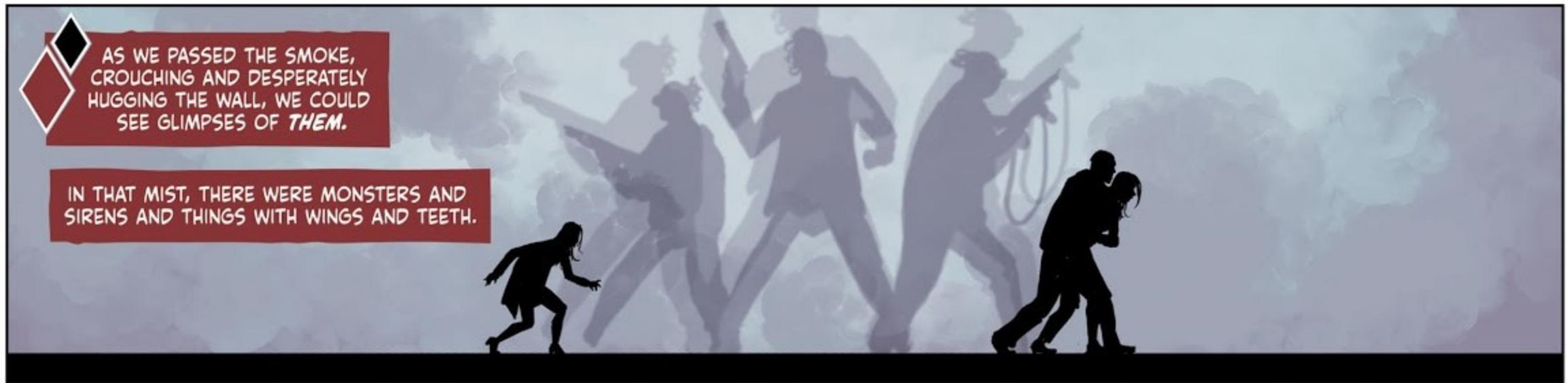
NGH...
THERE'S STILL
MUNITIONS IN THAT
ALLEY...GOD KNOWS
WHAT ELSE CAN
GO OFF.
WE TRY
TO CROSS
NOW, WE MIGHT
GET CAUGHT IN
ANOTHER
BLAST.



OKAY, CHANGE OF PLANS! THIS
WAY! STICK TO THE WALL AND
STAY LOW!

CAN'T YOU
CALL BACKUP OR
SOMETHING?

LADY,
WE WERE THE
BACKUP!







THERE ARE NO MORE GUNSHOTS, AND YET
THIS SILENCE FEELS EVEN MORE TERRIFYING.

IT IS A SILENCE OF
ANTICIPATION...

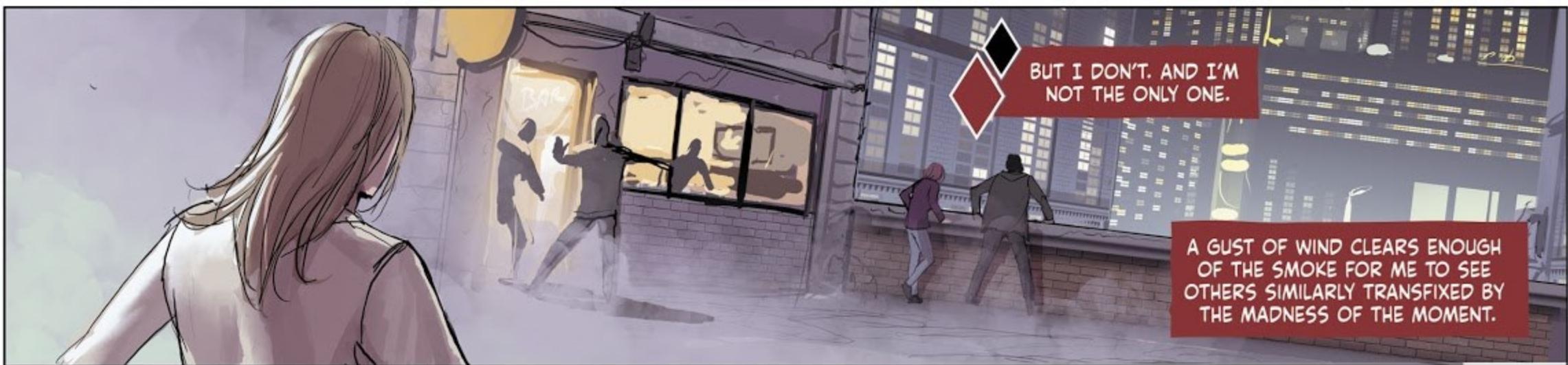


...LIKE THE MOMENT JUST AFTER A
FLASH OF LIGHTNING IN THE DISTANCE.

AND THEN IT COMES. A CRACK IN THE AIR,
A SOUND LIKE A MASSIVE FLAG FIGHTING A
GUST OF WIND, AND FOLLOWING IT, A
SINISTER LAUGH...







BUT I'M SNAPPED OUT OF IT BY A STRANGE THOUGHT...

IT DROWNED OUT THE SOUND...

THE CHEERING DROWNED OUT THE SOUND OF THE FIST CONNECTING.

INSTEAD OF SICKENING CRUNCHES, THE SOUNDS HIS PUNCHES MADE WERE...

more

kill

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, I TRULY FEEL IT.





CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY.

Gotham City.

I DECIDED TO KEEP THE
EVENTS OF THAT FATEFUL
NIGHT TO MYSELF.

WHO KNOWS, MAYBE IF I HAD TOLD
SOMEONE ABOUT THAT NIGHT, THINGS
WOULD HAVE GONE DIFFERENTLY.

MY LIFE WOULD HAVE
BEEN...DIFFERENT.

BUT I KEPT QUIET. THE LAST FOUR
YEARS WORKING AT THE CENTER
TAUGHT ME TO KEEP MY HEAD DOWN.

TO NOT ATTRACT ATTENTION.

SEE...I HAD THIS **FLING** WITH A
PROFESSOR BACK IN MY COLLEGE
DAYS AND PEOPLE FOUND OUT ABOUT IT.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE THINGS
THAT TEND TO STICK TO YOU.

TEND TO...DEFINE YOU
IN THE EYES OF SOME.

DIDN'T HELP THAT TWO OF THE
PEOPLE WORKING AT THE CENTER
HAD GONE TO SCHOOL WITH ME...

SUFFICE IT TO SAY, WORD GOT
AROUND. AND I GAINED A...LET'S
CALL IT A REPUTATION.

OKAY,
WHO DID YOU
\$#%& TO
GET IT?

HEY!

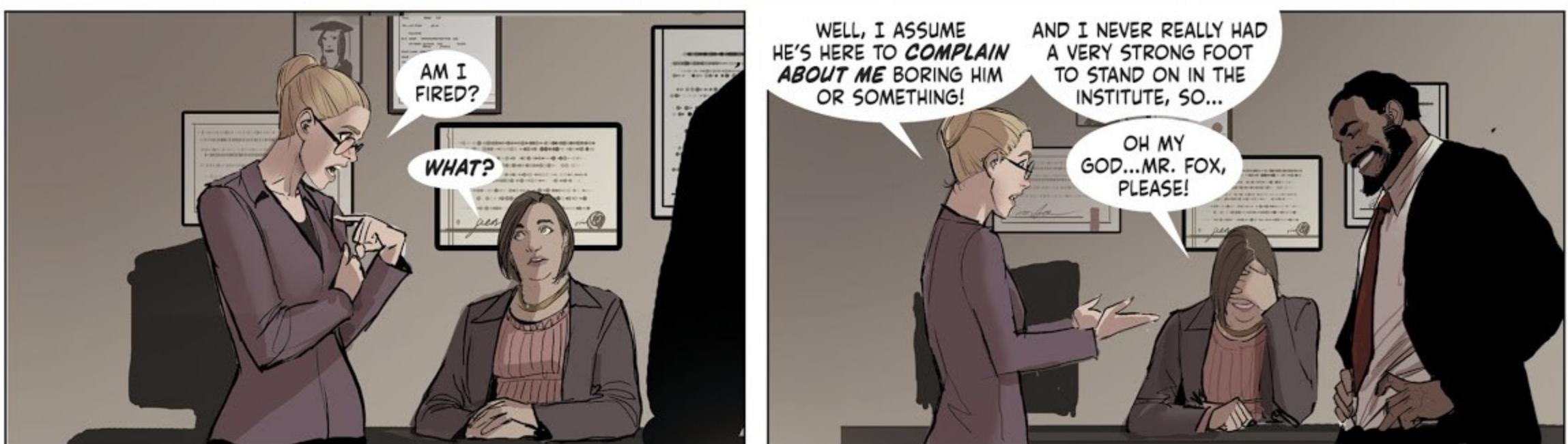
YOU KNOW WHAT? AFTER MY
WEEKEND I'VE GOT **ZERO**
PATIENCE FOR YOUR
BULLSHIT, PAULINE!

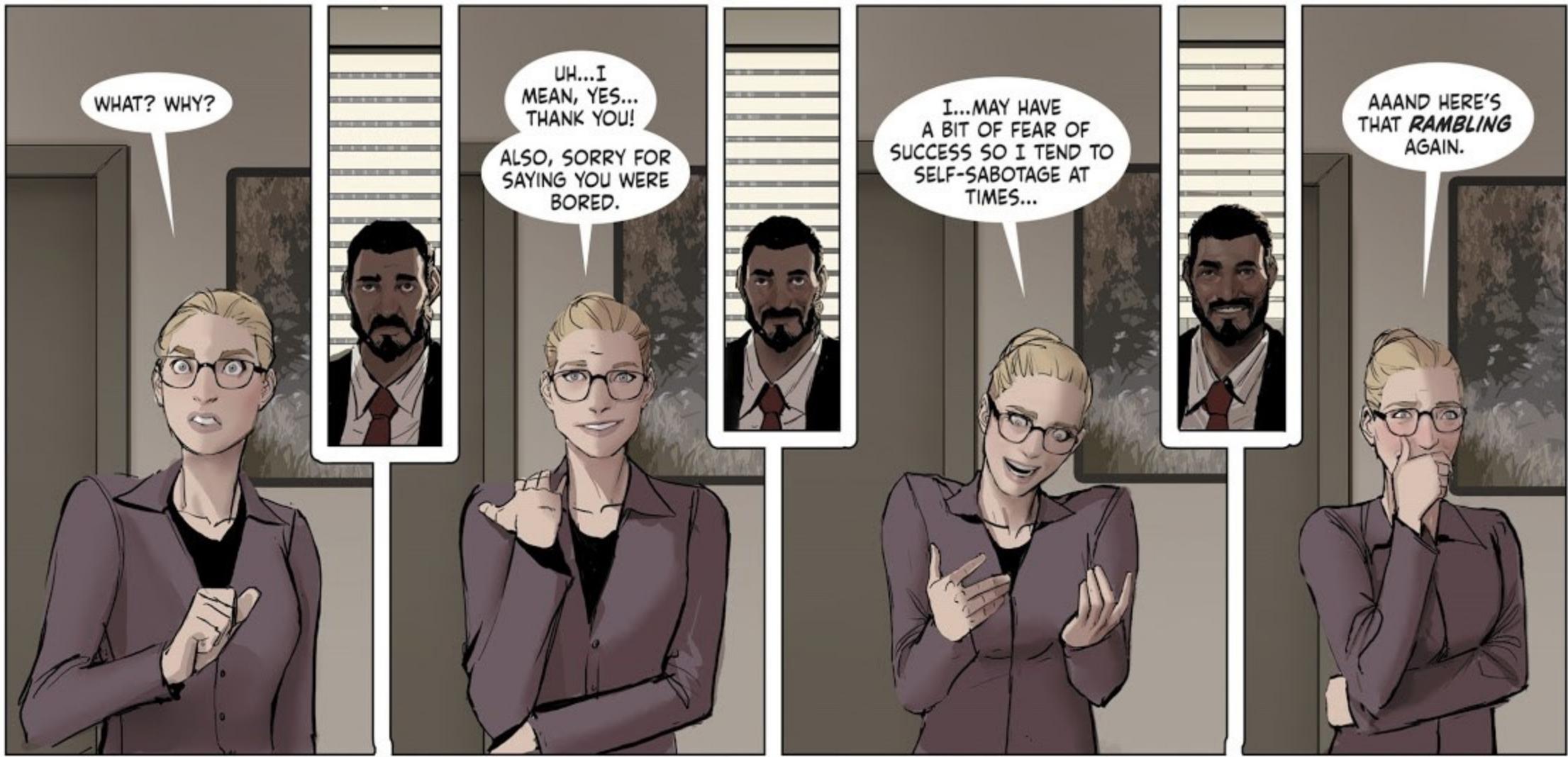
OH, DON'T YOU
GIVE ME THAT **CRAP**! HOW
DID YOU **DO IT**? DID YOU \$#%&
SOMEONE FROM THE FINANCE BOARD?

QUINZEL, DR.
MATHEWS'S OFFICE,
NOW!

UH, DR. MATHEWS?





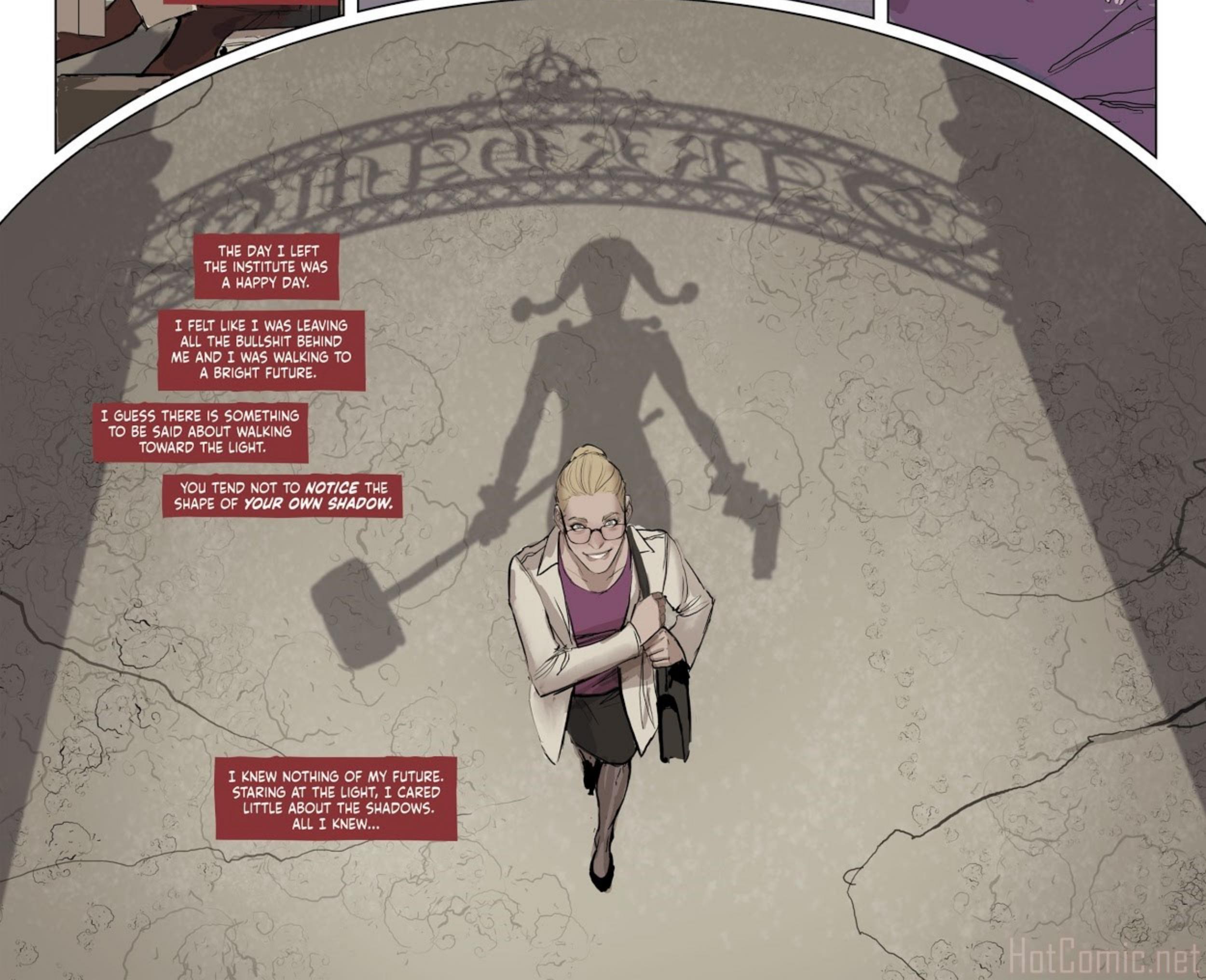




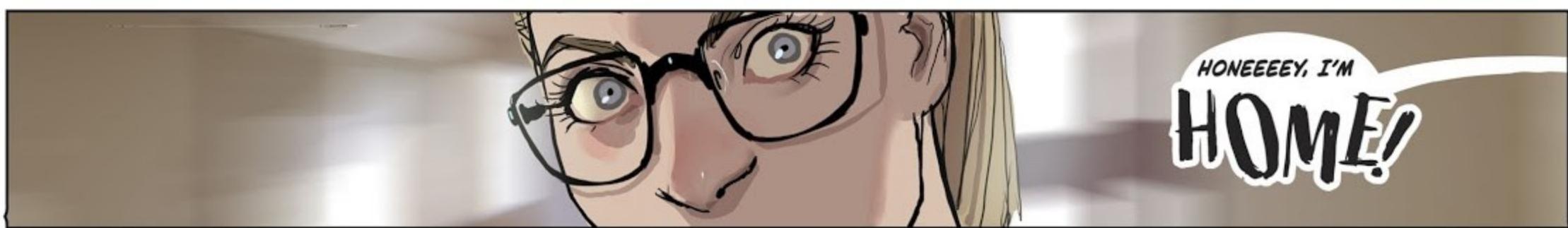


AND THERE IT WAS. ONE THING WENT RIGHT FOR ME, AND ONE PERSON HAD MY BACK, AND I FELT LIKE A MILLION BUCKS.

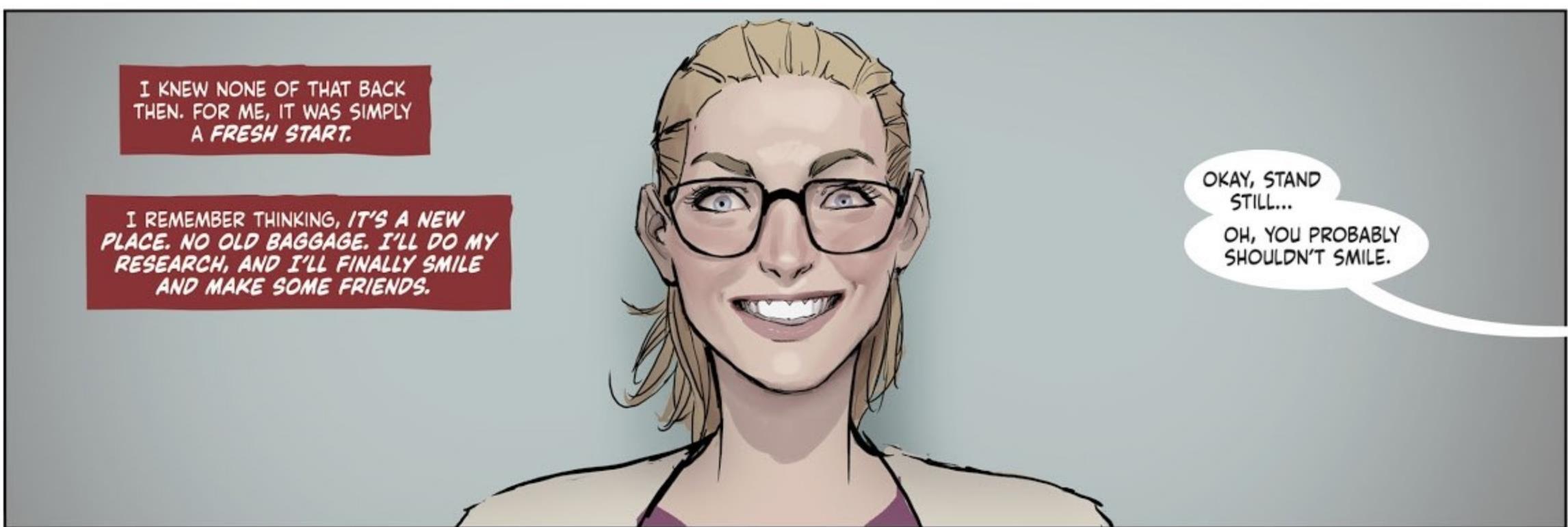












TURNS OUT, ARKHAM
WAS NO PLACE FOR SMILES.

HERE YOU
GO, DOCTOR
UH...DOC!

HARLEY WILL DO.

OR FRIENDSHIPS...

DOC HARLEY...OKAY.
BY THE
WAY, YOU'LL WANT
TO CHECK IN WITH
DR. STRANGE.

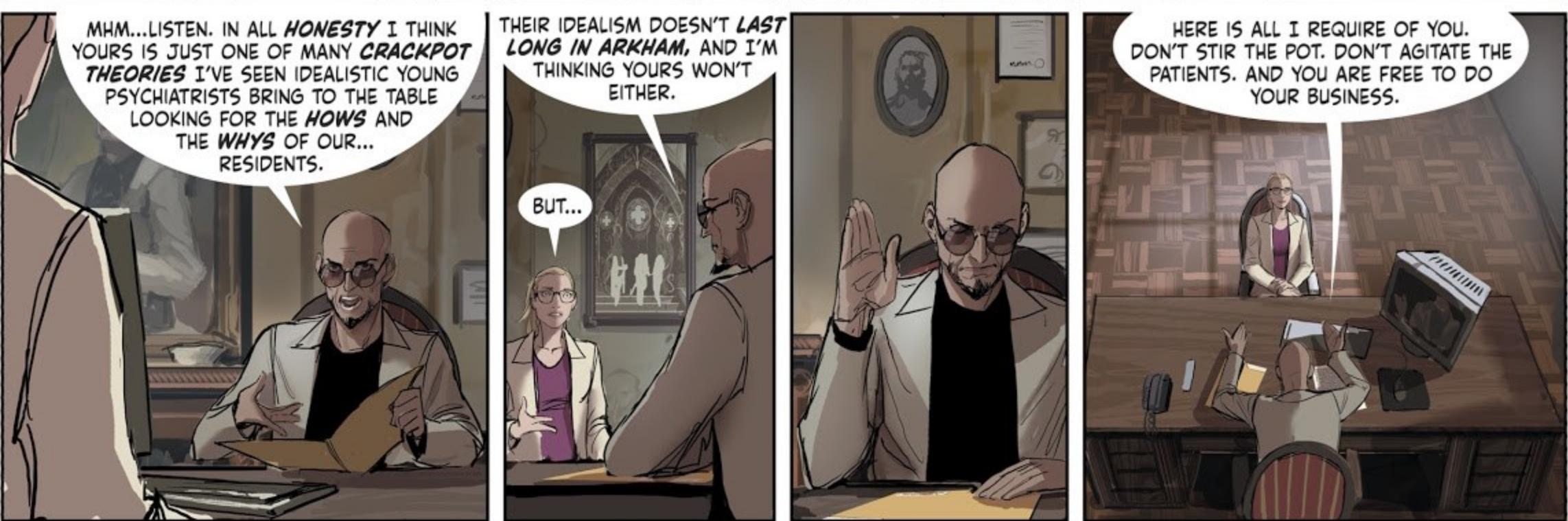
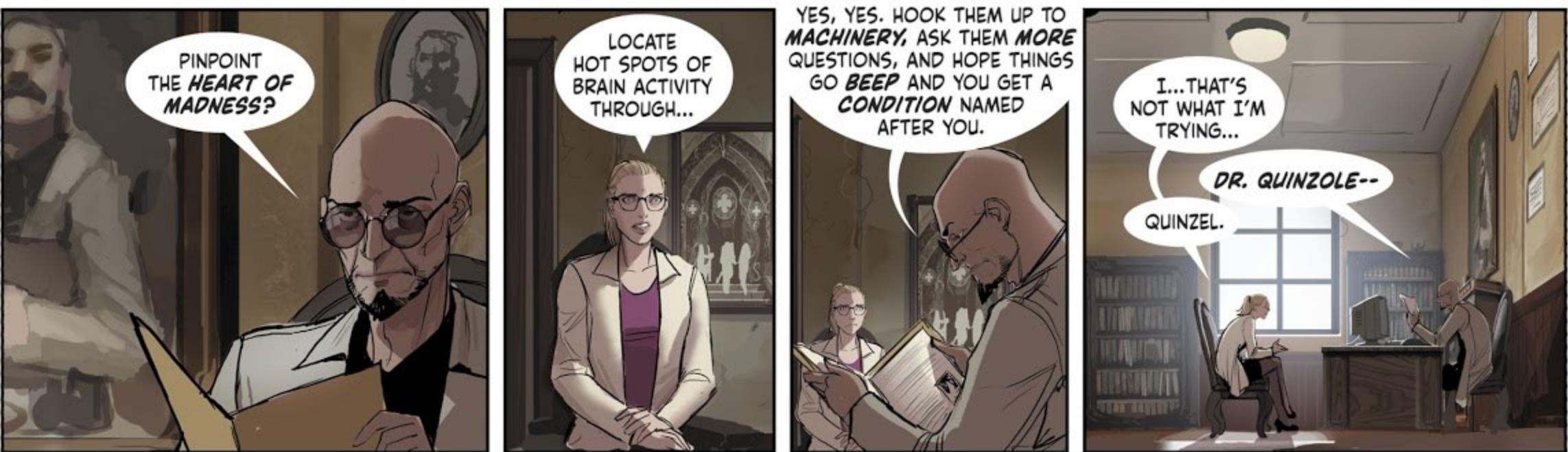
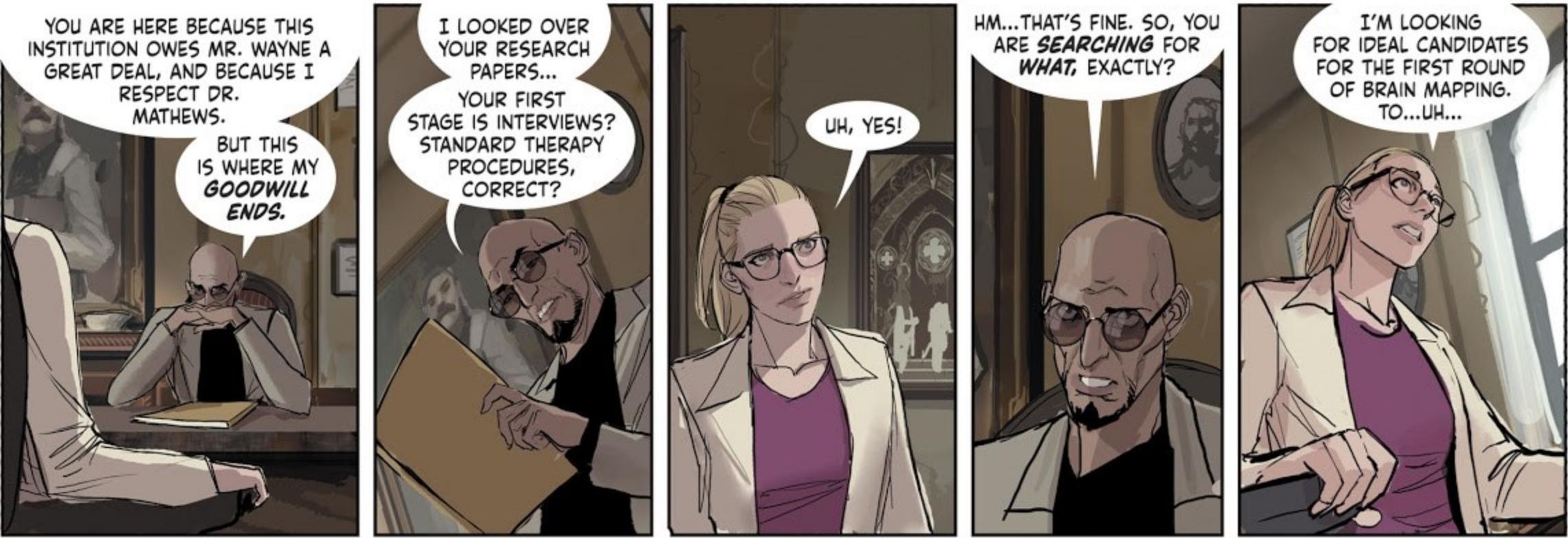
HUGO STRANGE M.D.

NOW
THEN, DR.
QUINZOLLE...

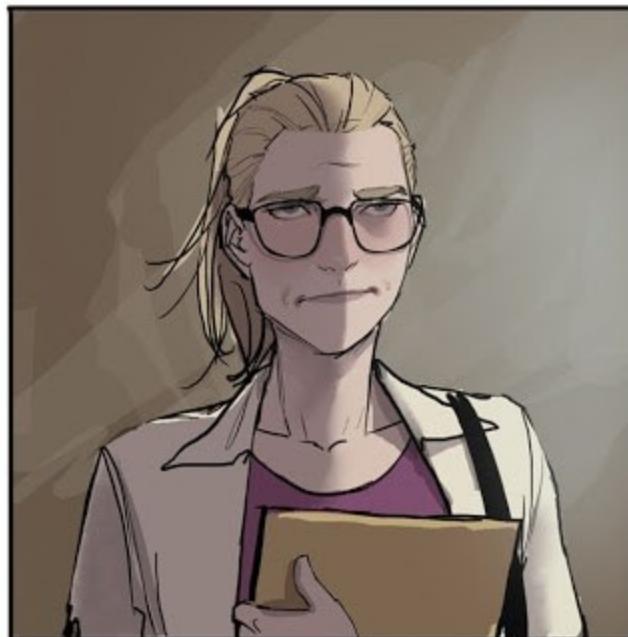
OH
FOR CRYING
OUT LOUD...

ARKHAM
IS A PLACE OF
HEALING.

AND
I VERY MUCH
INTEND TO KEEP
IT SO.



HE SAID WELCOME, BUT LET'S BE HONEST, THIS WAS ARKHAM.



A SMALL, WINDOWLESS OFFICE WITH A MISSPELLED NAME WAS AS GOOD AS IT GOT.

Dr. Quinzoll

AND I WAS OKAY WITH THAT. BEATS A CUBICLE, AND ANYWAY, I HADN'T GONE THERE FOR COMFORT. I HAD A JOB TO DO.



I CAME TO ARKHAM WITH A LIST IN HAND. A VERY SPECIFIC LIST.



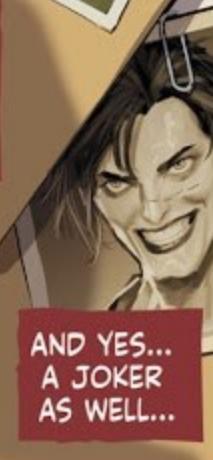
IT COMPRISED PEOPLE WHO WOULD BE MY PERFECT EXAMPLES OF THE ABSOLUTE DETERIORATION OF EMPATHY.

I HAD A SIMILAR LIST FOR BLACKGATE PRISON, BUT AS I WASN'T ALLOWED THERE AT THE MOMENT...WELL, YOU KNOW HOW IT GOES. YOU PLAY THE CARDS YOU HAVE, NOT THE CARDS YOU WANT.

AND MY, WHAT A DECK IT WAS. EVERY PSYCHOLOGIST'S DREAM. THE STUFF THAT CAREERS ARE BUILT ON.



THE KINGS, QUEENS, JACKS, AND ACES OF THE CRIMINALLY INSANE.



AND YES... A JOKER AS WELL...

BACK OF THE LINE FOR YOU.



I WASN'T NEARLY READY TO DEAL WITH HIM... BUT THAT WAS FINE.

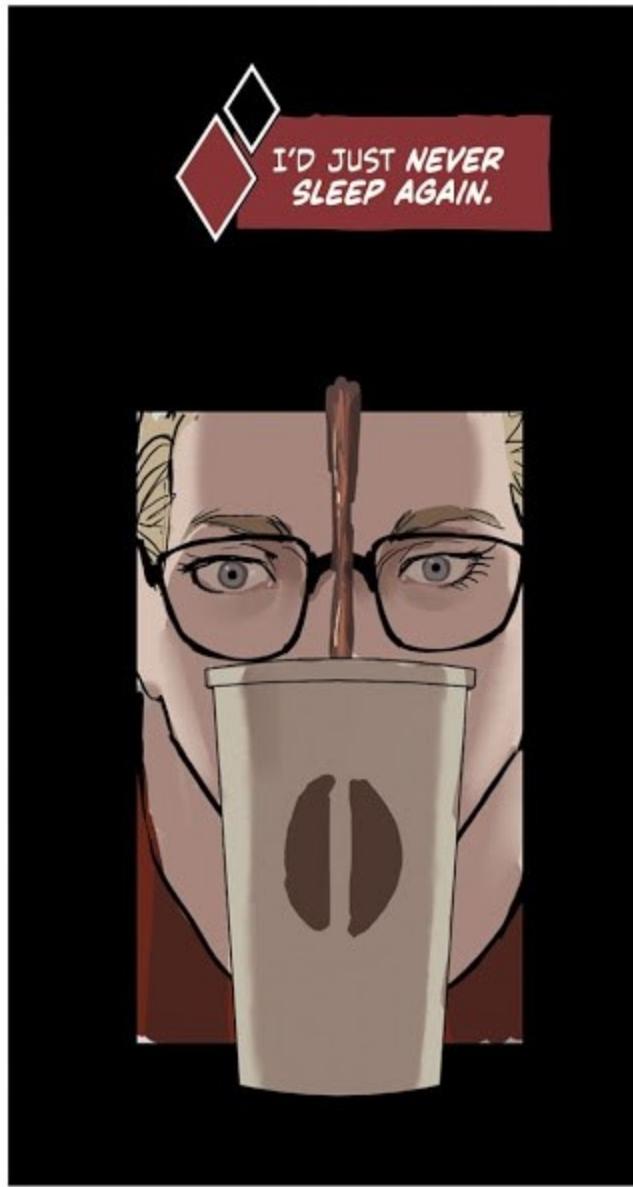


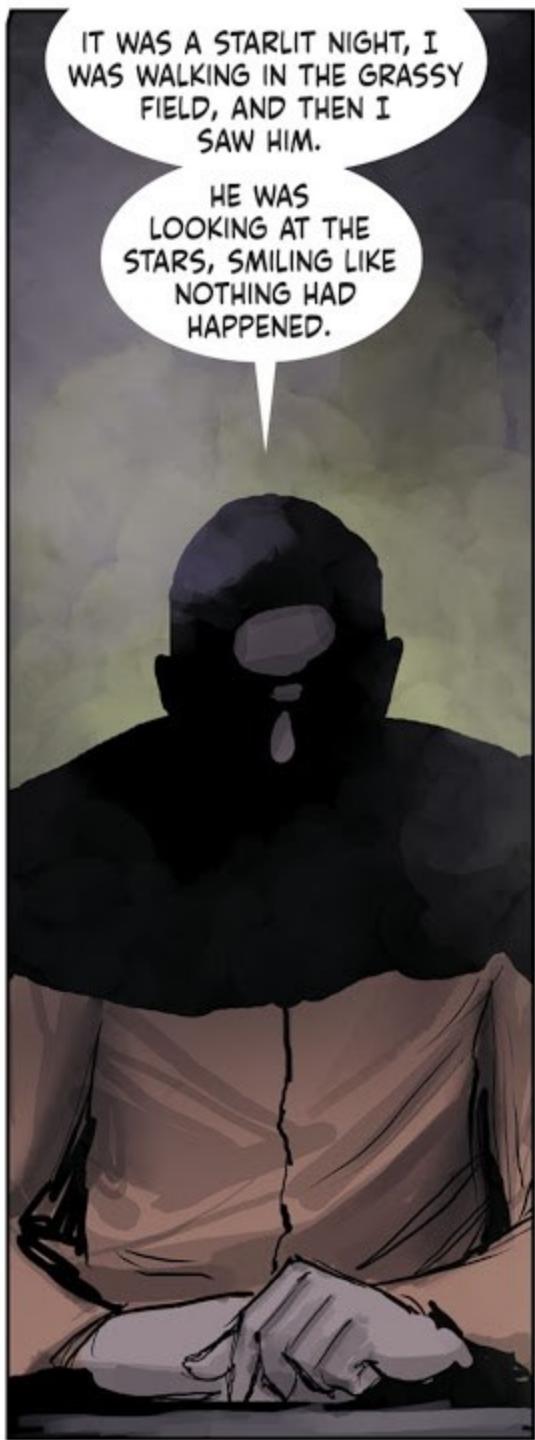
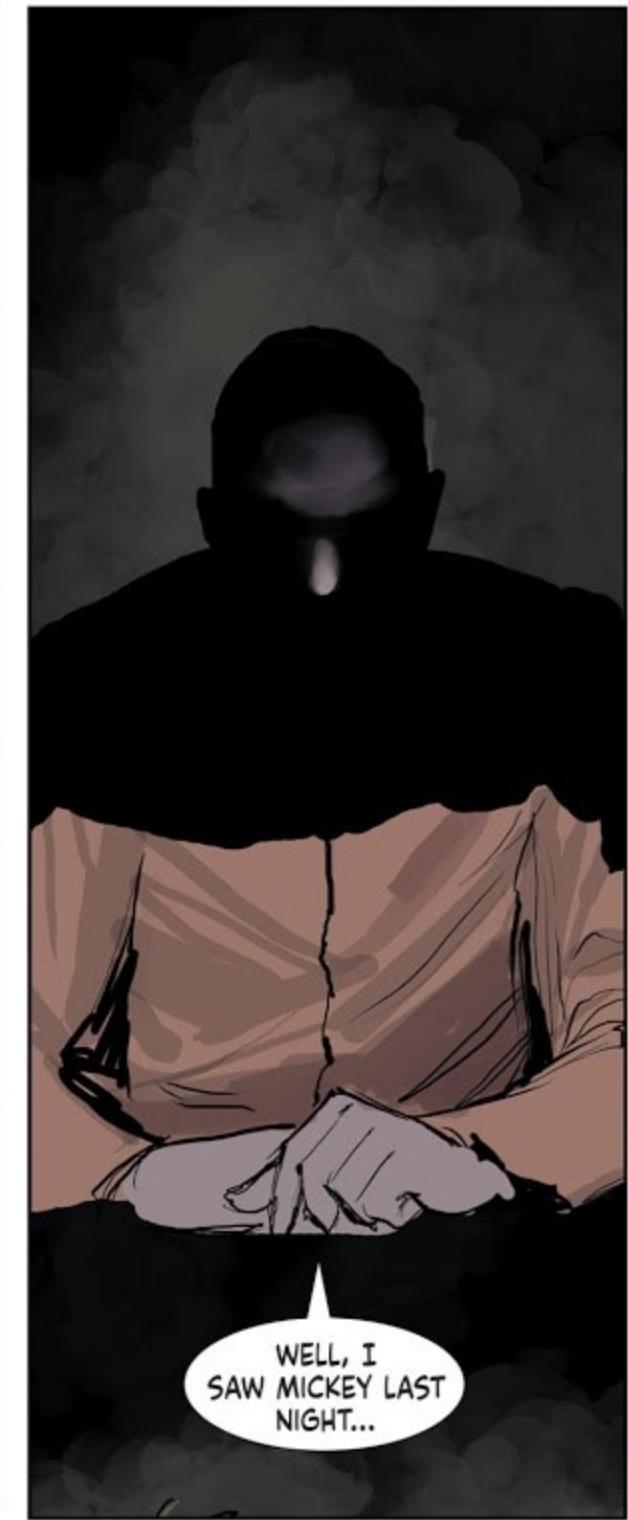
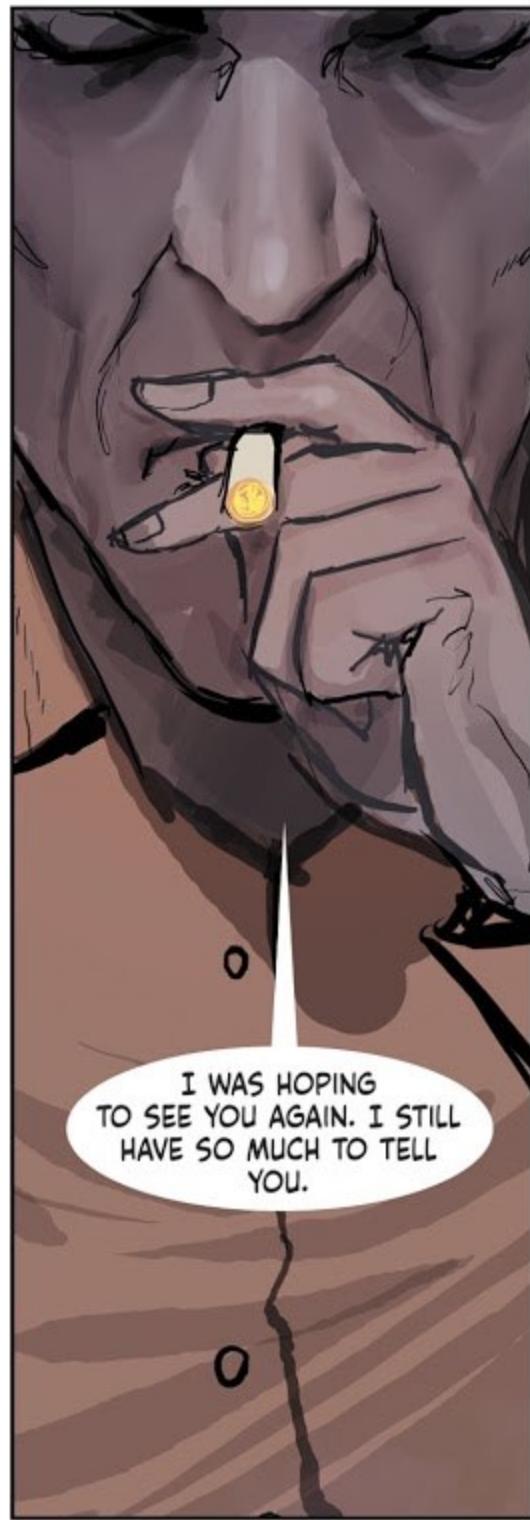
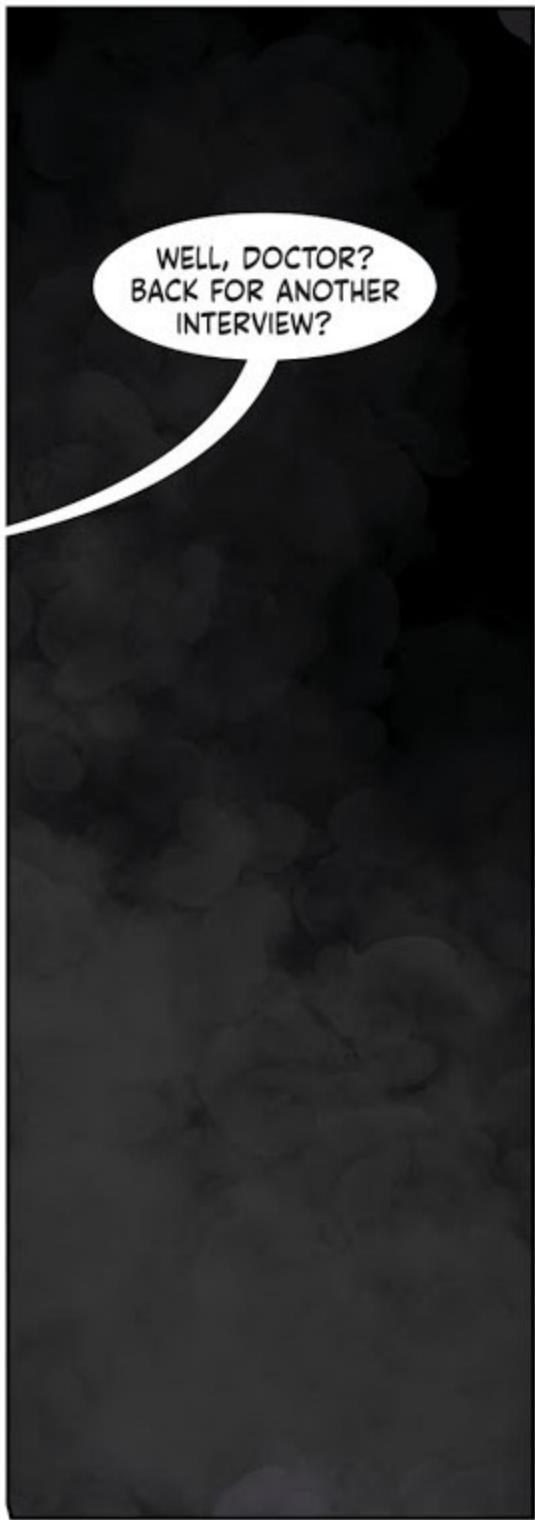
I HAD MORE THAN ENOUGH ANTSOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDERS TO GO THROUGH.



THE WAY I SAW IT, BY THE TIME I WAS DONE WITH THEM, MY NIGHTMARES WOULD HAVE GONE AWAY, AND HE WOULD SHRINK IN THE EYES OF THIS...WELL... YOU GET IT.

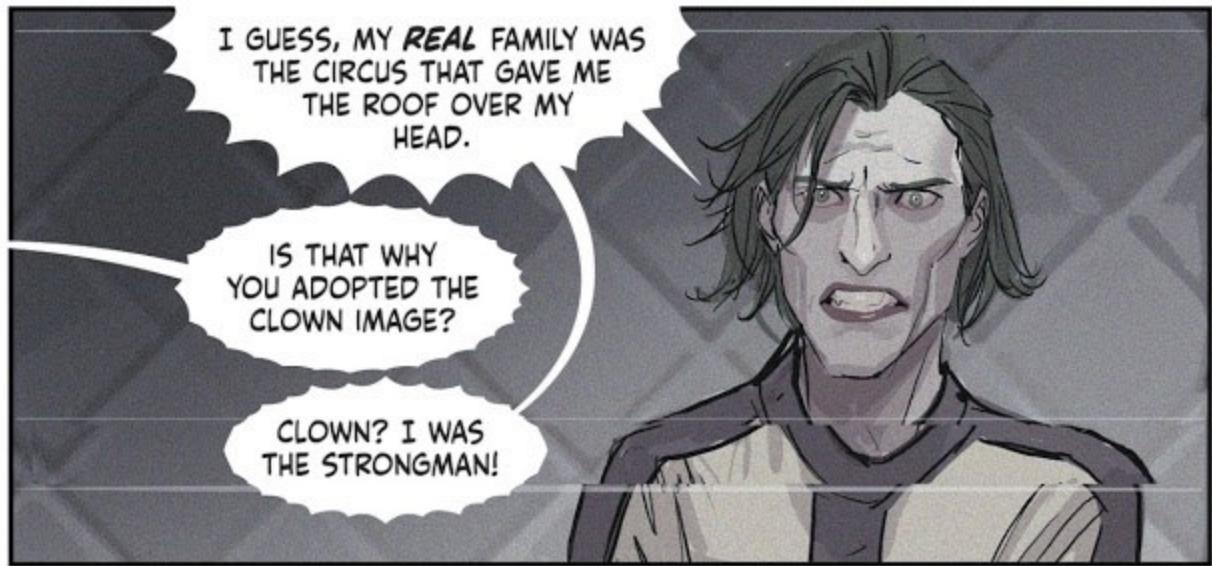
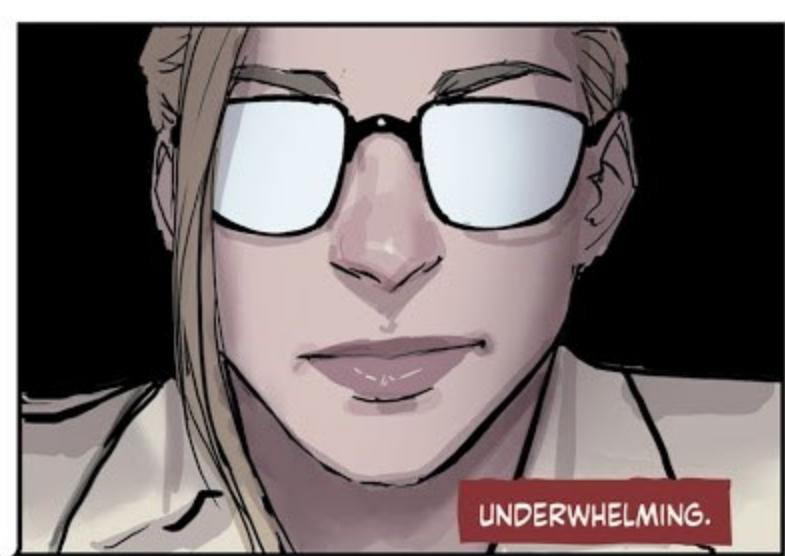






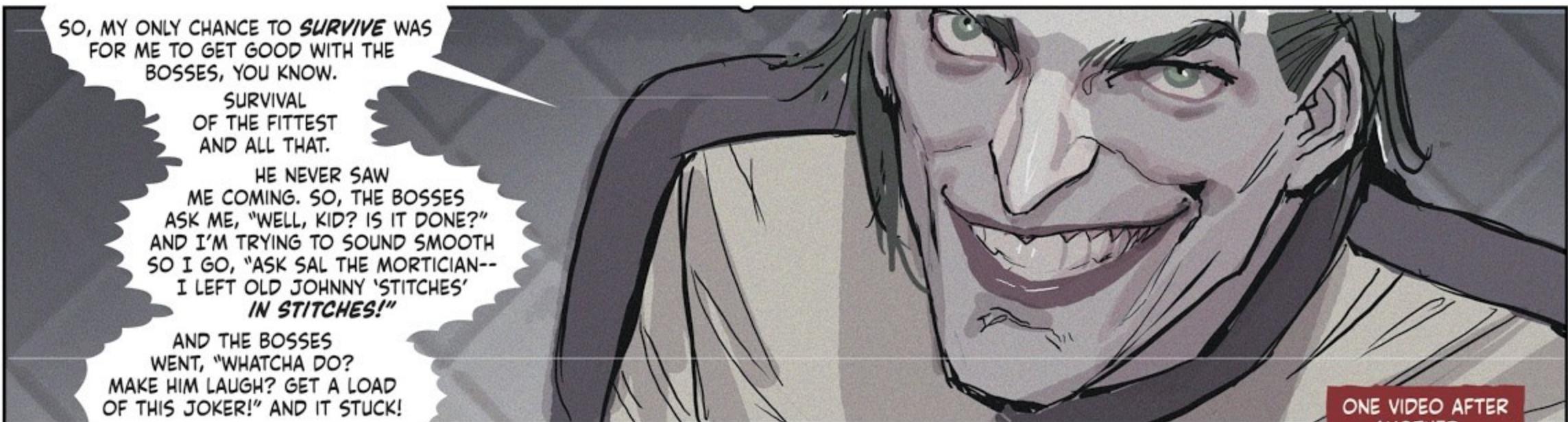
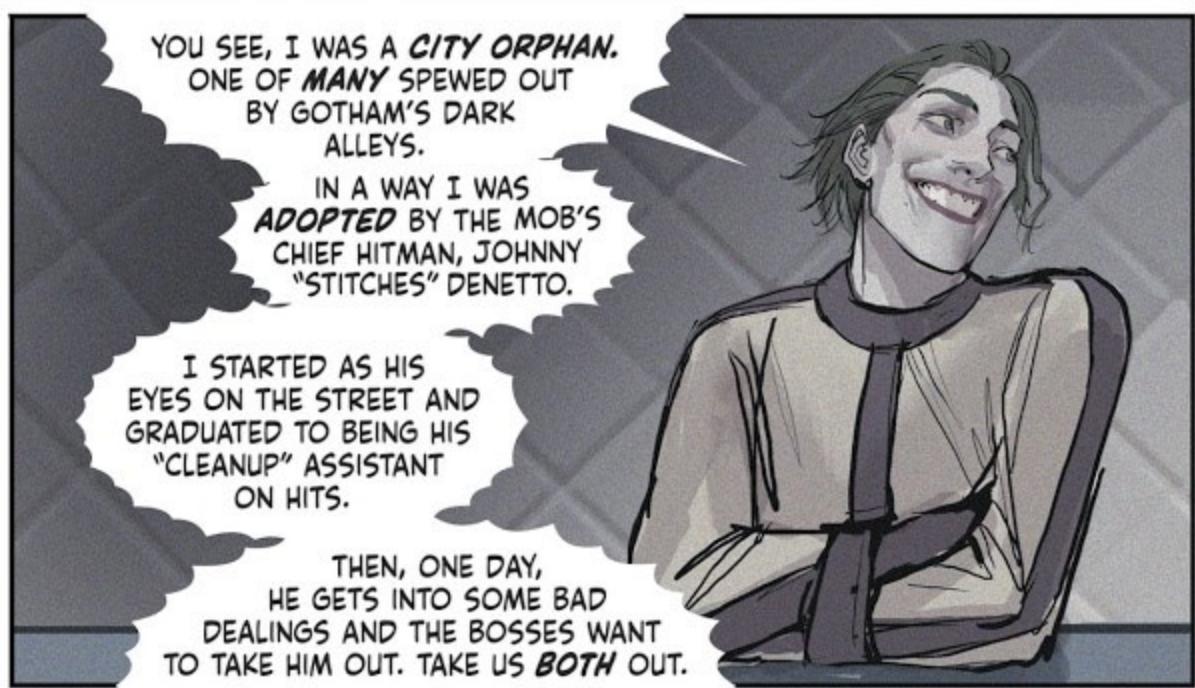
BWAH!

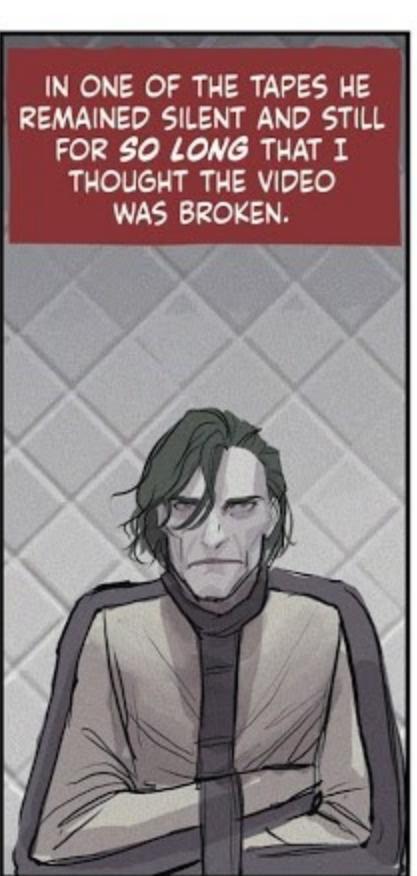


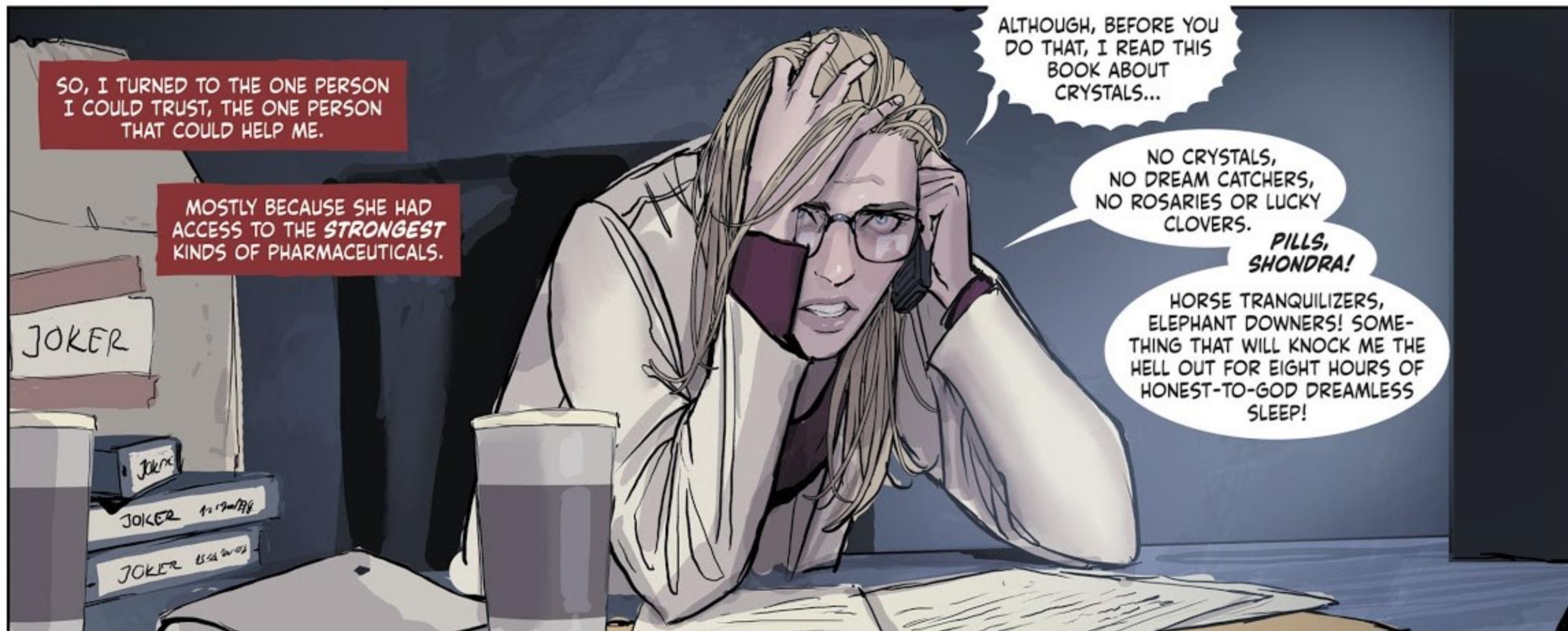
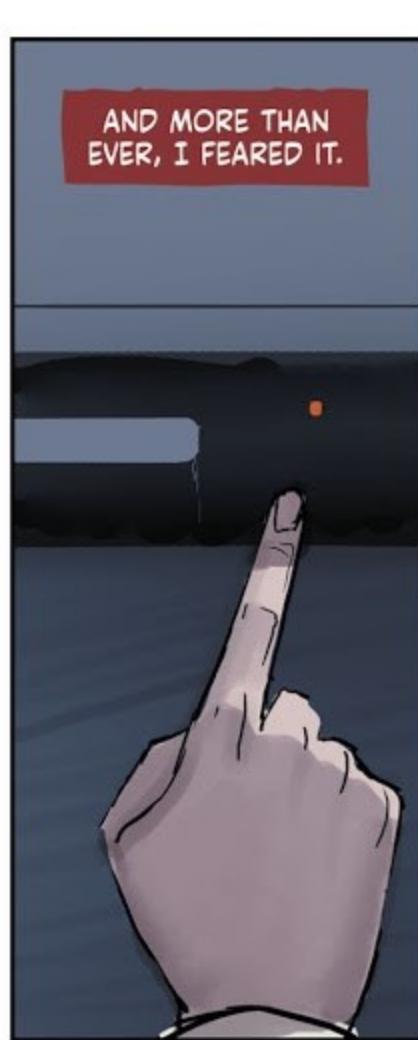


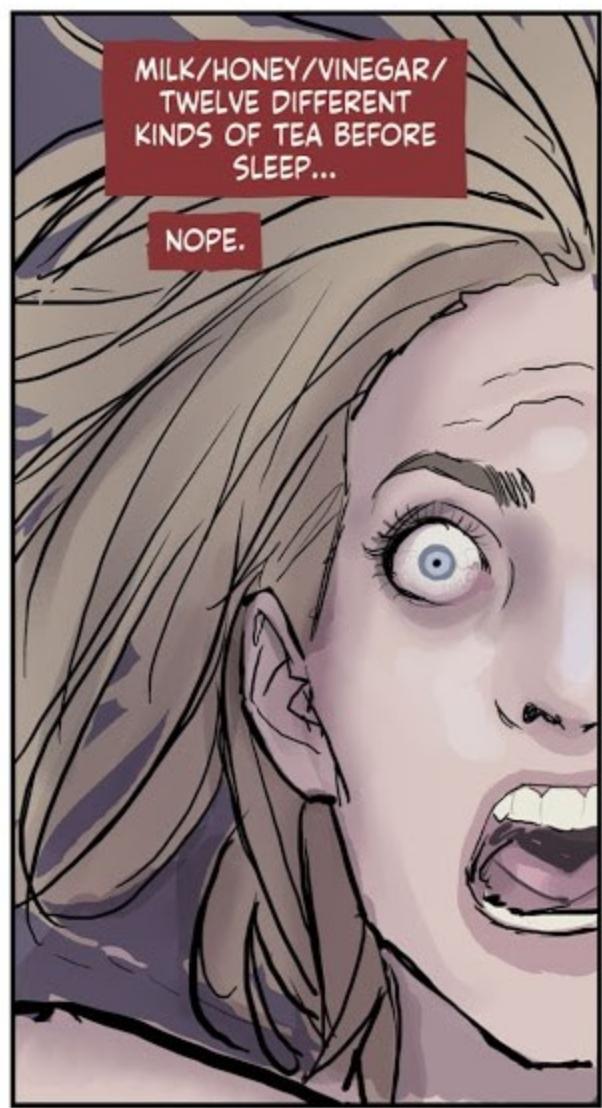
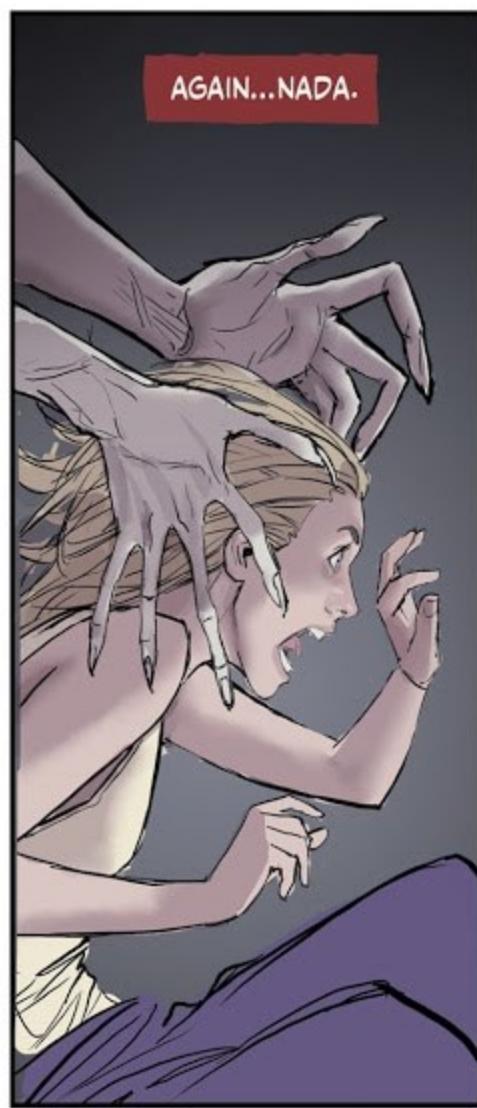
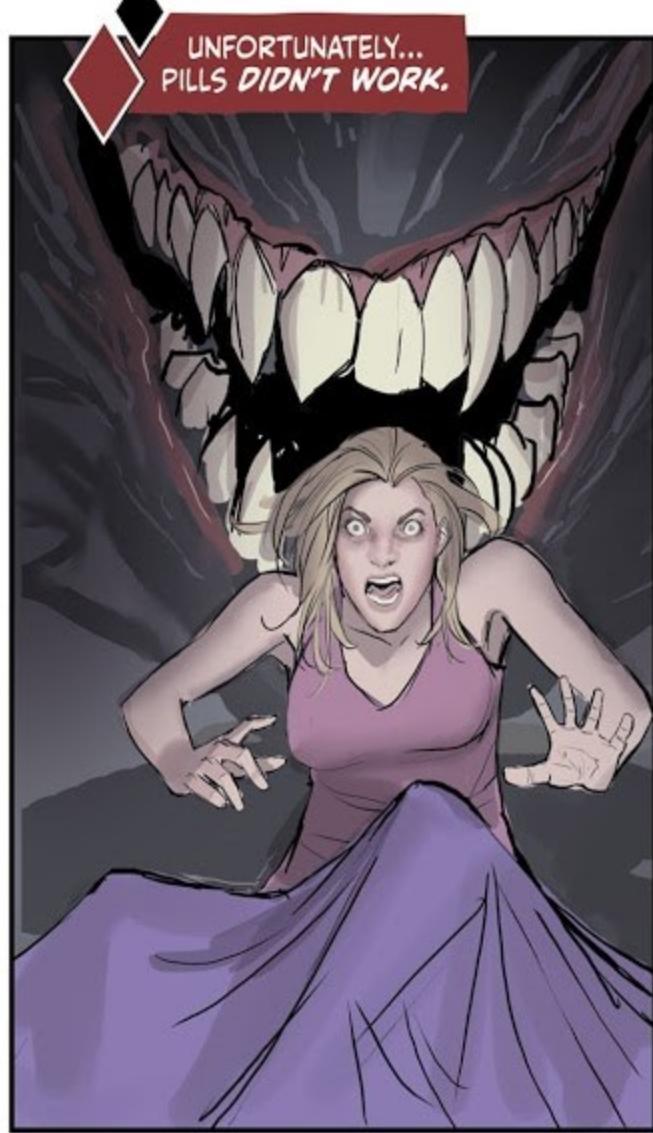
THIS WASN'T THE GRINNING MAN WITH THE COLD VOICE WHO HELD ME AT GUNPOINT. FOR A MOMENT I FOUND MYSELF QUESTIONING MY OWN MEMORIES: MAYBE I JUST SAW HIM IN A MORE TERRIFYING LIGHT? AFTER ALL, HE NEVER REALLY PULLED THAT TRIGGER.

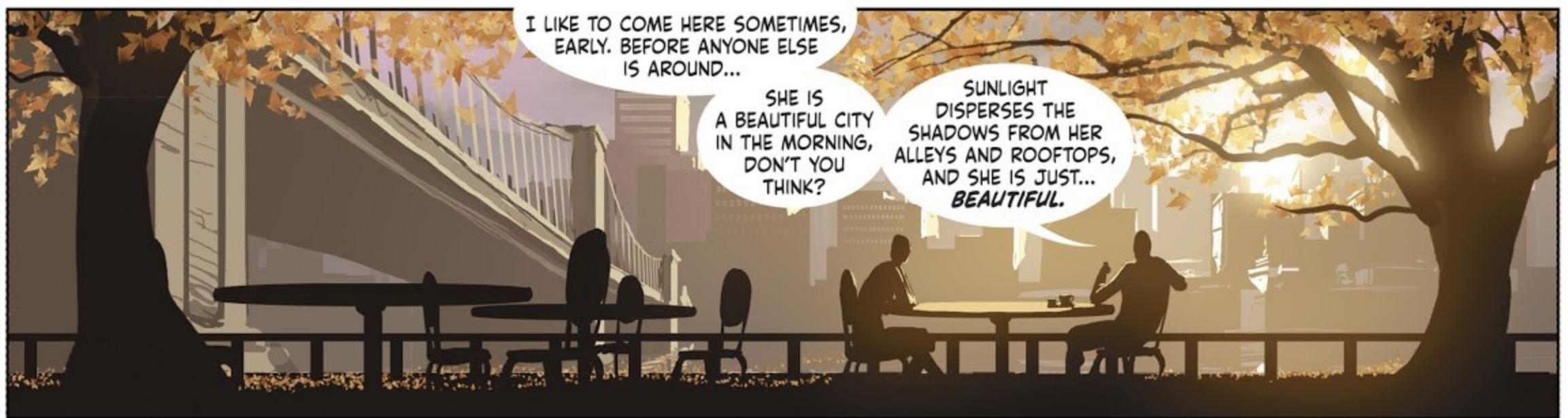
BUT THEN, AS I KEPT WATCHING, I STARTED NOTICING IT.











BRUCE WAYNE IS...HE'S A **GOOD MAN**. HIS WHOLE LIFE, HE'S DONATED TO CAUSES LIKE YOURS, DESPERATELY TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE **WHY** BEHIND THE MINDLESS VIOLENCE THAT BEFELL HIS FAMILY.

I FAIL TO SEE WHAT THAT HAS TO DO WITH MY RESEARCH! AND ALSO, WHAT GIVES **YOU** THE RIGHT--

LET ME FINISH, PLEASE.

SEE, BRUCE IMAGINES THE CRIMINALS OF THIS CITY AS BROKEN, BUT **FIXABLE**.

I ASSUME YOU SHARE THIS OUTLOOK IN THE SAME WAY I ONCE DID.

HOWEVER...

I'VE DEALT WITH THEM FOR LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW BETTER.



IN MY FIFTEEN YEARS AS A **PROSECUTOR**, I'VE WITNESSED **DEPTHES OF INHUMANITY** THAT WOULD MAKE HONEST PEOPLE OF GOTHAM **NEVER** LEAVE THEIR HOMES AGAIN.

MR. DENT, I'M SURE THIS LITTLE SPEECH GOES ON FOR A WHILE LONGER, BUT SINCE I SPEND MOST OF MY TIME THESE DAYS LISTENING TO THE SELF-AGGRANDIZING IDEOLOGIES OF PATIENTS IN ARKHAM, I'D RATHER NOT DO IT **HERE** AS WELL. COULD YOU GET TO THE POINT?

FINE. WHILE YOUR BOSS TRIED TO SLIP IT UNDER THE RADAR, ONE OF YOUR COWORKERS ANONYMOUSLY CALLED MY OFFICE AND INFORMED US ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH...



A THREAT TO THE VERY NOTION OF PROTECTING **LAW AND ORDER** IN GOTHAM.

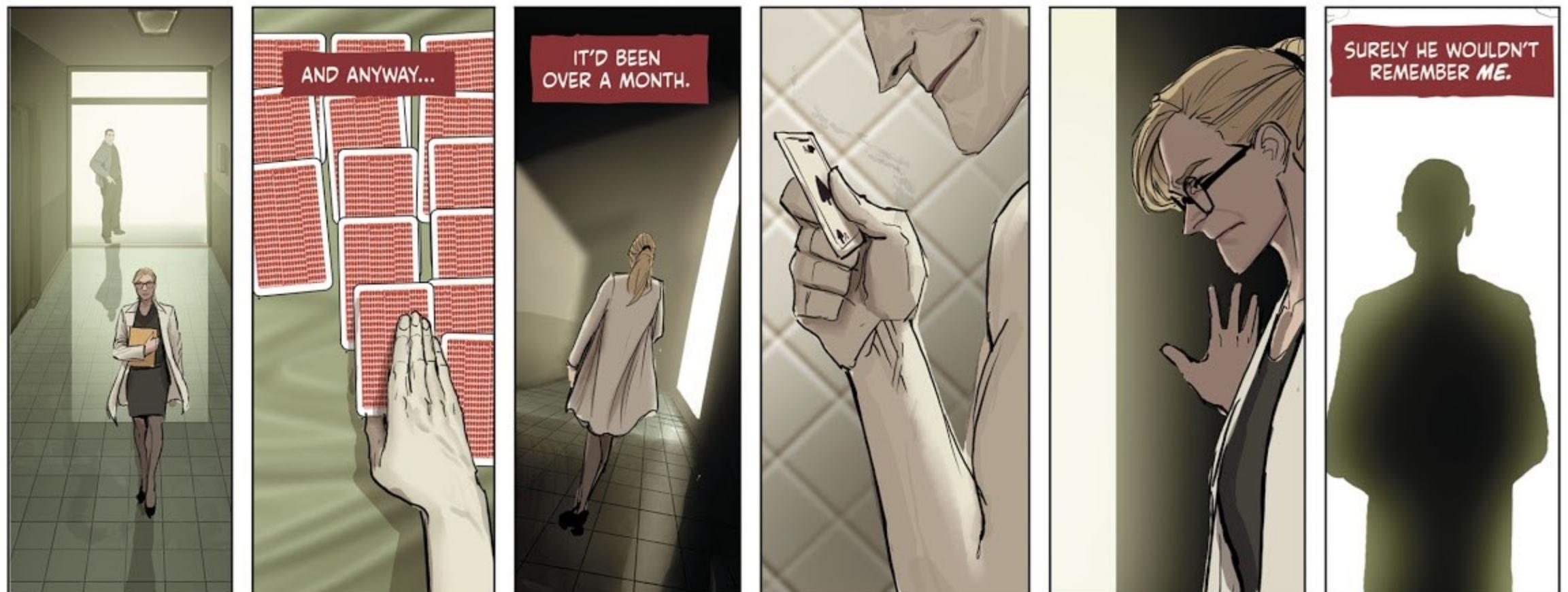
RIGHT NOW, EIGHT OUT OF TEN OF THE **MOST-HARDENED** CRIMINALS ARE SITUATED NOT IN MAXIMUM SECURITY FACILITIES LIKE BLACKGATE, BUT IN **ARKHAM ASYLUM**!

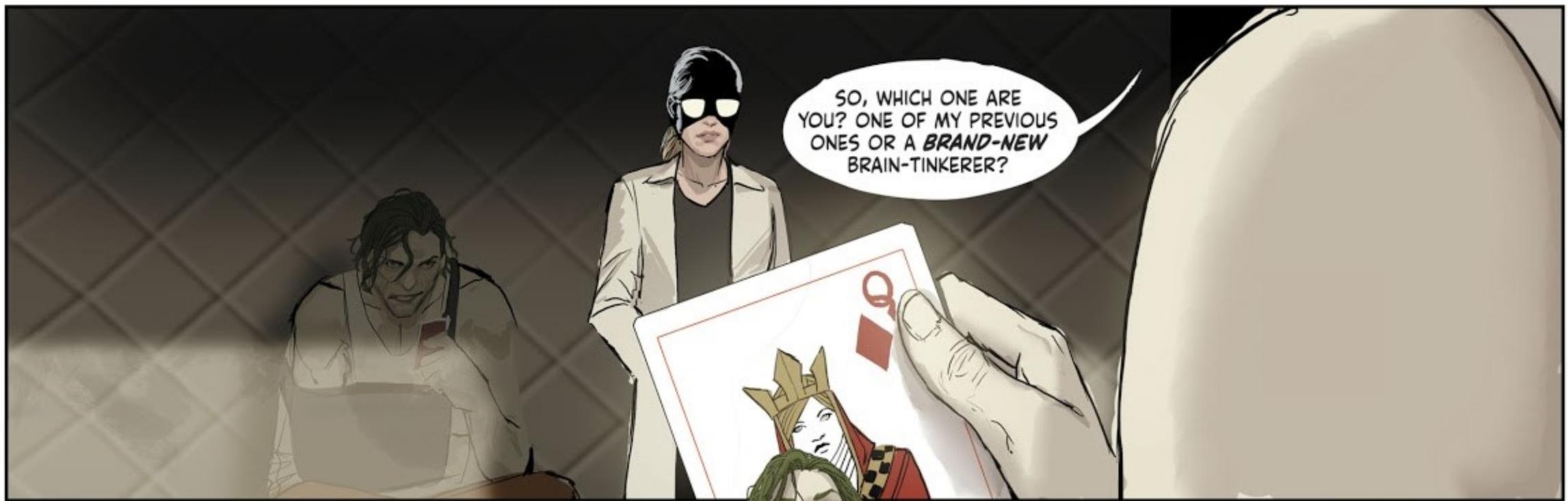
THE BREAKOUT RATE THERE IS SO HIGH THE BLOODY PLACE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE REVOLVING DOORS INSTALLED!

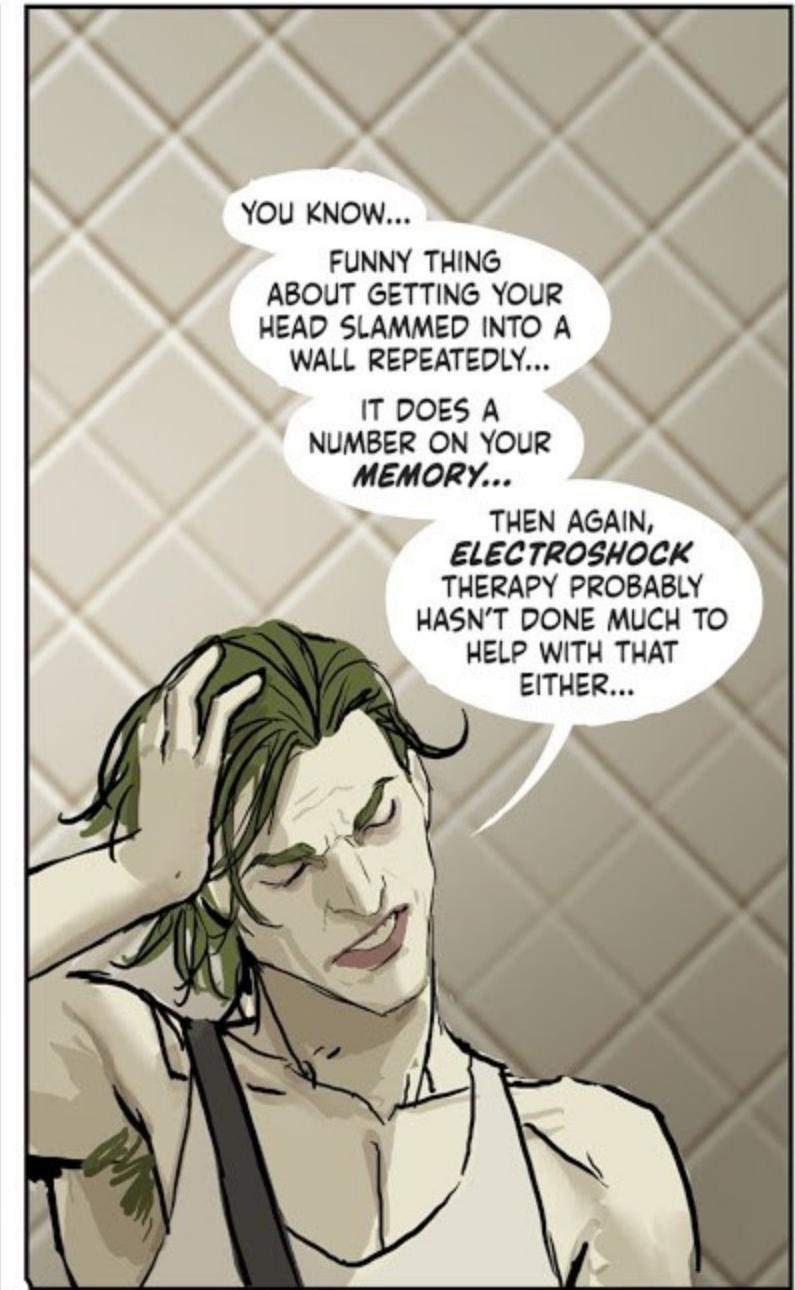
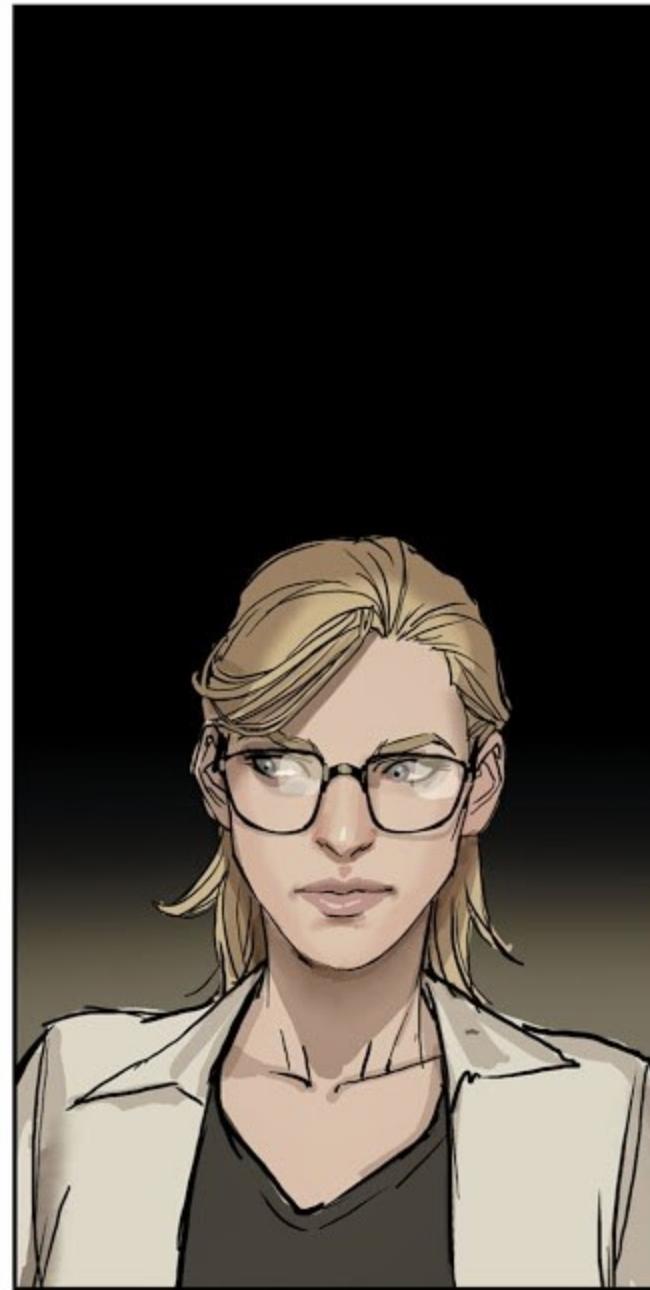
YOU PUBLISH YOUR RESEARCH AND EVERY DEFENSE LAWYER LOOKING TO BUILD A CAREER WILL JUMP ON IT LIKE A **RABID DOG**, AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, EVERY TRIAL WILL BE NOTHING BUT LAWYERS TELLING SOME SOB STORY ABOUT HOW THEIR CLIENTS LOST THEIR ABILITY TO **FEEL EMPATHY**.

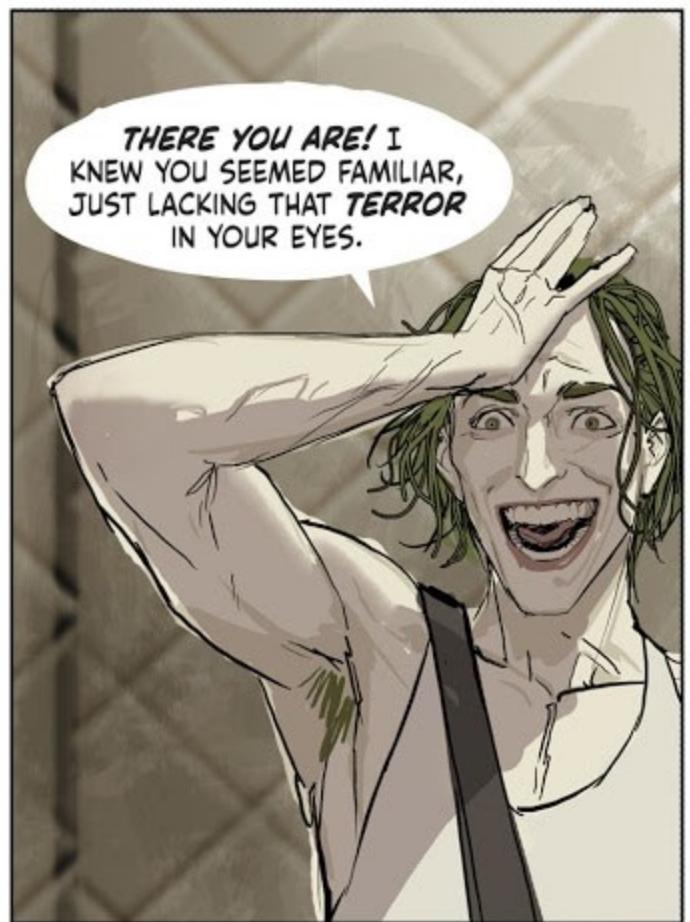


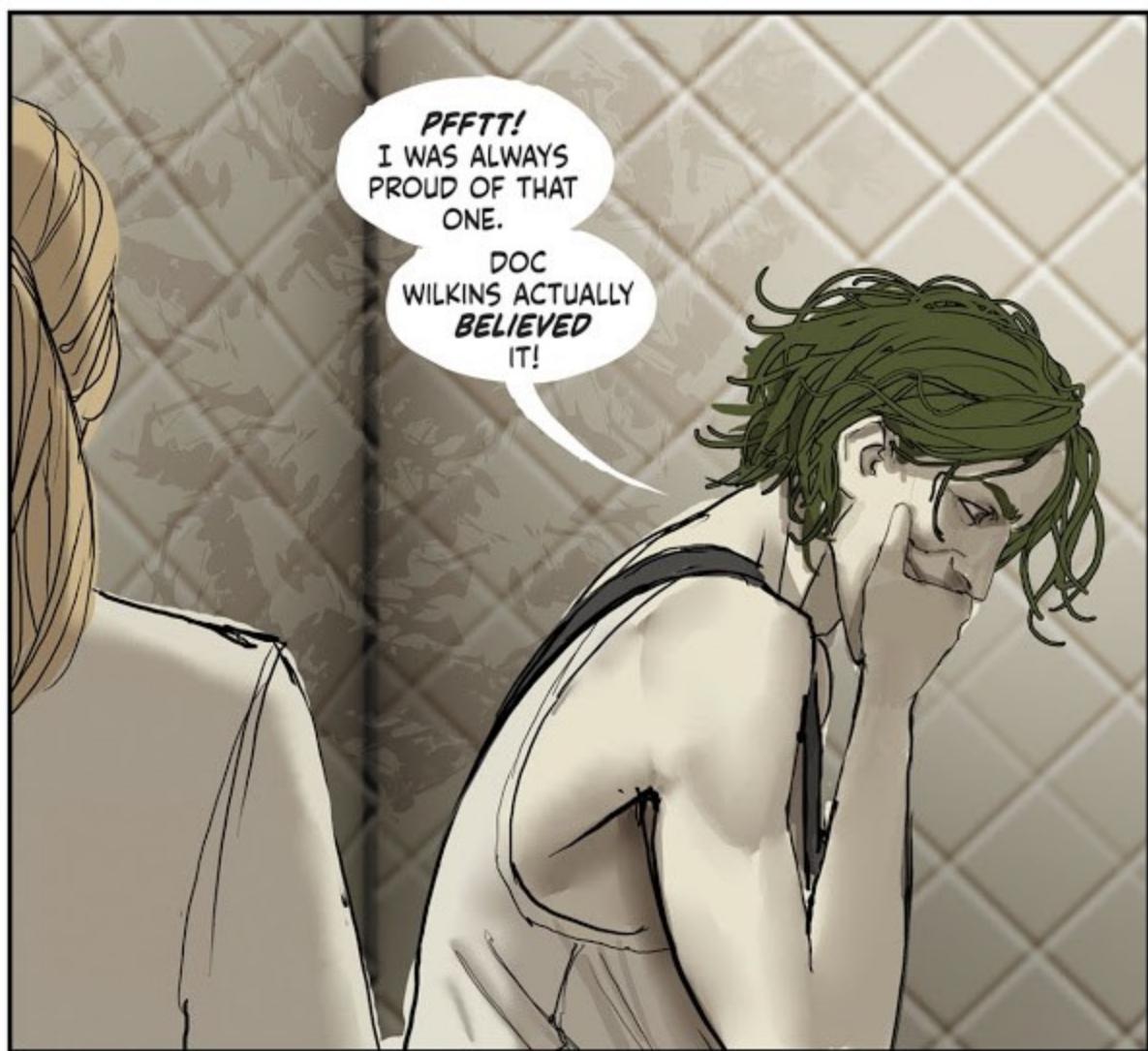


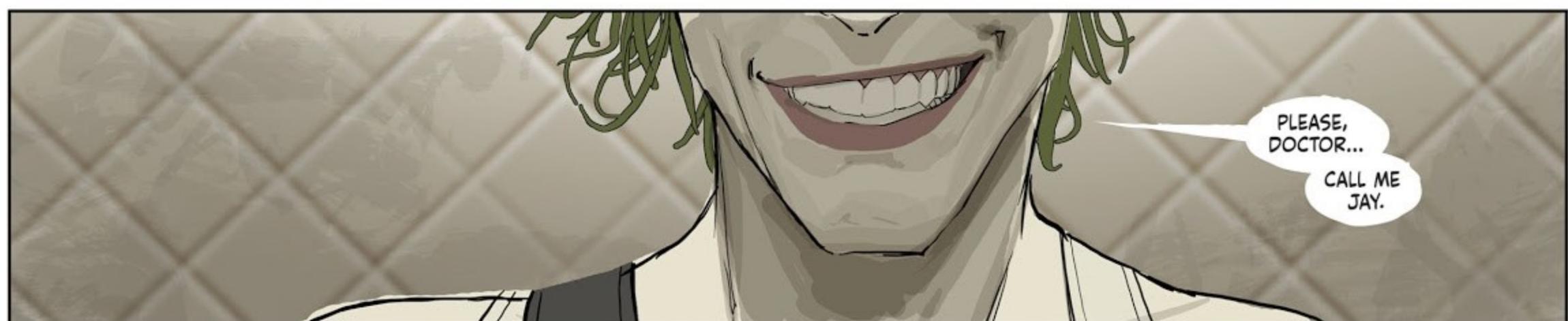
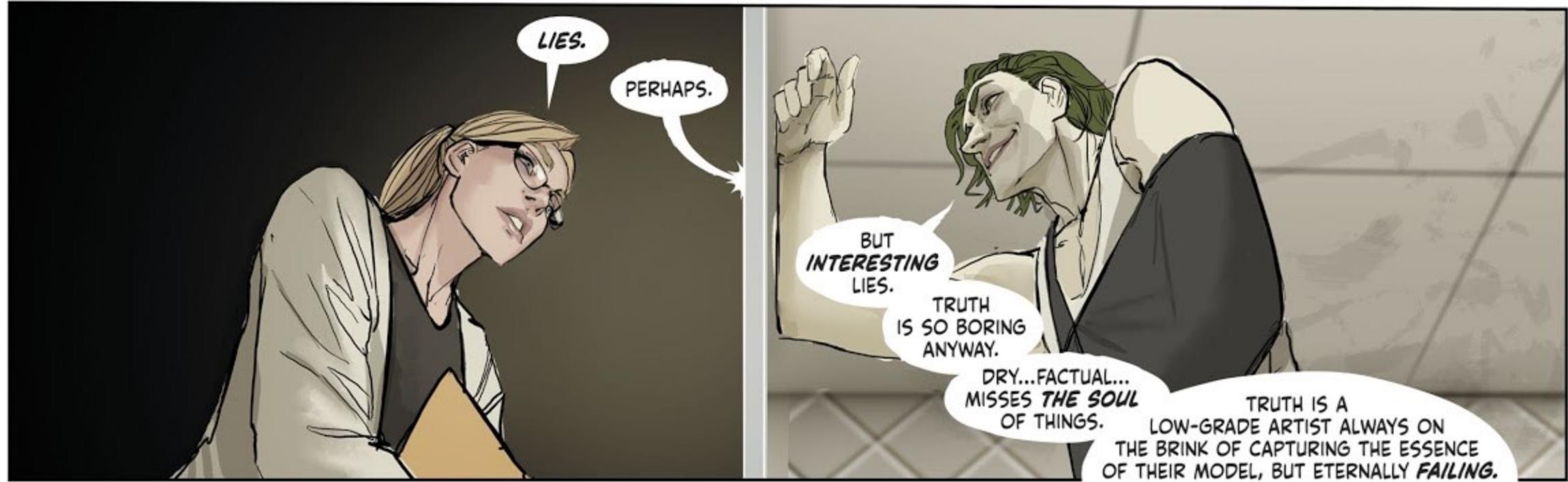














I REMEMBER THINKING,
THIS IS FINE. I CAN
CONTROL THIS SITUATION.

IT WAS NEITHER THE FIRST
NOR THE LAST TIME I WAS
WRONG ABOUT THAT.

VERY WELL,
MR. JAY.



END OF CHAPTER ONE



**“HEAVEN
HELP ME...”**

**“...A SMALL
PART OF ME...”**

**“...WANTS TO
LET HIM IN.”**

HARLEEN

BOOK TWO - IN STORES OCTOBER

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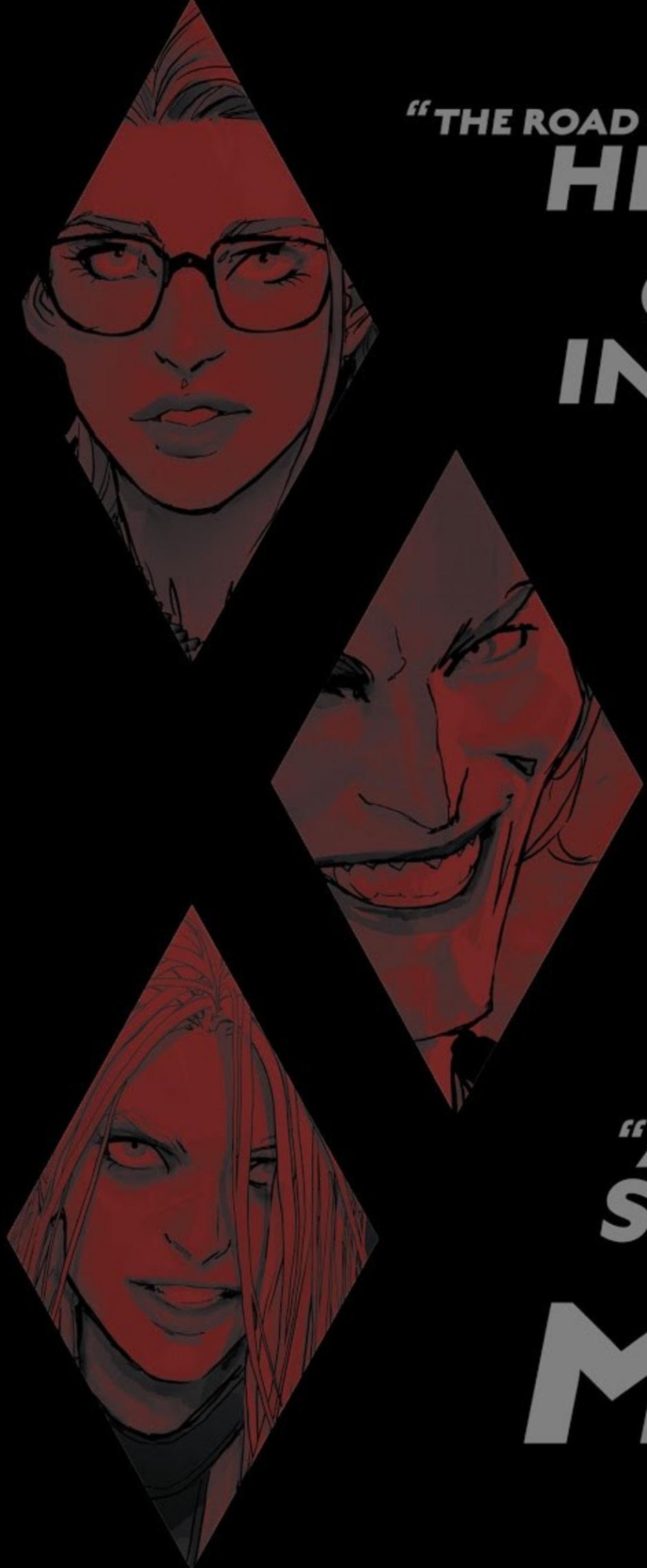
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**“THE ROAD TO
HELL
IS PAVED WITH
GOOD
INTENTIONS.”**

**“ON THAT ROAD
I SAW A
PALE
MAN,**

**“AND HE
SMILED
AT
ME...”**

A BRILLIANT YOUNG PSYCHIATRIST WITH THE CURE FOR THE MADNESS OF GOTHAM, DR. HARLEEN QUINZEL, TAKES DRASTIC MEASURES TO SAVE THE CITY FROM ITSELF. WITNESS THE BIRTH OF THE LEGENDARY SUPER-VILLAIN HARLEY QUINN IN THIS STUNNING REIMAGINING OF HARLEY AND THE JOKER'S TWISTED AND TRAGIC LOVE AFFAIR BY ACCLAIMED STORYTELLER STJEPAN ŠEJIC (AQUAMAN: UNDERWORLD, SUNSTONE).

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